

PLUCK AND LUCK

SURE AND STEADY
AND OTHER STORIES

OR A BOY
ENGINEER'S
FIRST JOB

By Jas. C. Merritt.



The crowd rushed at the outlaw, who quickly decamped, Jim Dobbs and the red bearded man going in an opposite direction. Tom saw the mine boss, and asked: "Have you had notice of a reduction in wages?"

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SURE AND STEADY

OR, A BOY ENGINEER'S FIRST JOB

By JAS. C. MERRITT

CHAPTER I.—An Engine With a Bad Record.

"I want to see the superintendent."

"What about?"

"That's my business—and his."

"Well, you can't see him; he's busy."

"That's what you say. Tell him I want to see him, and we'll see what he says."

A quiet-spoken young man and a red-headed office boy were in conversation in the ante-room of a railroad superintendent's office.

The young man was determined to see the superintendent, and the boy's statement that the man was busy had no weight with him.

As a matter of fact, the superintendent was not over busy just then, and at that moment he appeared at the door of his private office.

"I'd like to see you a moment, Mr. Blauvelt, if you are not too busy," said the young man, stepping forward and quietly pushing the office boy aside.

"About what?"

"Getting a job on the road."

"What sort of a job?"

"Engineer."

"Are you one?" asked the superintendent, looking the young man over with a critical eye.

"Well, I'm looking for my first job in that line, but I know I can do it. I've been a fireman for a year and have studied all the points of a locomotive."

"Where have you worked? You seem to be a stranger here."

"In the East."

"How did you know my name?"

"Your name is on all the advertisements of the B. & G. road."

"But how did you know that I was Mr. Blauvelt?"

"It says 'General Superintendent' on your door. You came out, this boy ducked his head, there was only one other person in your office and I am sure that he is not the superintendent."

"And why are you so sure?" asked the other, with a smile.

"Because he has his hat off. You have yours on. You are the only one privileged to keep your hat on in your own office."

"Quite right. You are evidently a young man of great discernment. Richard," to the office boy, "mail those letters. I will see you in a few moments, young man. Excuse me for a little while."

Mr. Blauvelt entered his private office and said to his visitor, a stout man of florid complexion, smooth-faced and bald-headed, who sat with his hat on his knee in a very deferential attitude:

"I've got the man for you. He's a stranger looking for his first job. I'll give him engine One Hundred, and send him out this afternoon."

"What! Old Hundred? That out-of-date old tub? If she don't blow up with him, she'll never make any sort of time to Bad Man's. Why can't you put on one of the regular engines?"

"If I do it will be suspected. Old Hundred often makes the run on the branch. This young fellow seems sure and steady; he's a new man, there's no danger of his being in with the hard crowd at and about Bad Man's, and no one will suspect what he's being sent for. I tell you, Stalker, he's just the one."

"All right, Blauvelt, I leave the thing entirely in your hands."

The superintendent stepped to the door and called the young man in, and said:

"I will see you now. Take a seat. What is your name?"

"Tom Hall."

"Not much of it, is there?"

"Well, it's all I can take care of, just now."

"How old are you?"

"Nineteen."

"I can't very well give you a job at that age. You couldn't get an engineer's license."

"I thought it wouldn't make much difference out here. I can run an engine all right. I might have told you I was twenty-one."

"Why didn't you?"

"Because I'm only nineteen."

"Well, as you say, it doesn't make much difference. You look twenty-one, and you don't have to tell everybody your age. I can give you a job running an engine on a short branch. I'll give you a note to the yard superintendent, Mr. Rugg. He'll give you engine One Hundred. The train will leave at two o'clock. Can you be ready to go to work at that time?"

"I am ready now," said Tom, and in a few moments he departed with the superintendent's note.

"You didn't say a word to him about the grades, the curves, the roughness of the road, or the bad character of the country, and especially that part of it that Bad Man's Branch runs through," said the stout man.

"It's just as well that I did not. One trip will show us if we want to keep him. I think we will. He looks sure and steady, and that's what we want, particularly in an engineer on the branch. Send your man this afternoon with the package. No one will suspect. They'd never think of your sending it on a train in charge of a boy engineer."

"No, I suppose not."

At one o'clock Tom Hall reported to the yard superintendent, who looked him over, read Mr. Blauvelt's note and said, curtly:

"So your name is Tom Hall?"

"Yes."

"Well, you're to run Old Hundred up to Bad Man's and back. I don't envy you the job. None of the boys like it. You see, trains don't run on any regular time up to Bad Man's, but only when there's stuff to come down from the mine, or supplies to go up. You can go as fast or as slow as you like, only get back some time before night. There's only a single track on the branch, so you won't run into anything."

He led the way to the roundhouse and pointed out engine One Hundred.

"That all right," said Tom, looking the engine over critically, within and without. "Where's my fireman? I'll get up steam right away and start when you say."

Tom had steam up in half an hour, ran out upon the proper track, coupled on to the train, consisting of a baggage car and one passenger coach, and then, jumping down and walking over to Rugg, who stood on the station platform, said:

"Well, it's pretty near two o'clock. When do I start?"

"I'll let you know. Queer old tub of an engine, ain't she, regular old 'ark, hey?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"Going to keep you pushing every second to keep her on the track, needs a bar'l of ile to limber her up, and then she ain't no good, hey?"

"Oh, I don't know!" said Tom, as carelessly as before.

"Scussly wuth the price of old iron if she was broke up, and likely to blow up at any time, hey?" persisted the man, evidently desiring Tom to say something uncomplimentary of the old locomotive.

"Oh, I don't know!" Tom answered as before.

"No, you don't know," snapped Rugg, getting out of patience, "but I do. Old Hundred's got a bad record, she has. Can't make over ten miles an hour, nohow, likely to get stalled at any time, just as liable to blow her cylinder-head out, too, or bend a piston-rod, or break a crank-pin. Done all them capers more'n once. Reckon you won't care to travel with an old gal with a reputation like that, hey? None of the men do."

"Let me know when you are ready," said Tom. "I told the super I wanted a job, and I do. I said I'd take the special out on the branch, and I'm going to do it. Never you mind Old Hundred. She's sure and steady, all right," and the boy took a bit of oily waste, sprang on the bumpers and rubbed up the brass "100" on the boiler-head till it fairly shone.

Five minutes later a tall, thin, nervous-looking man in uniform came along, looked up and asked: "You the engineer? First job on this road, ain't it? All ready? I'm the conductor. My name's Babb. We're going to start in a minute

or two. I'll let you know when to stop. We don't make any regular stops on the branch, except at Bad Man's, and that's because it's at the end. Old Hundred takes it into her head to stop herself, sometimes. She's about as ornary a critter as I ever see. You won't take to her, I don't guess."

"Oh, I don't know," said Tom. "An engine is like a horse, or a man, or anything else. Treat it right and you won't have any trouble. I ain't afraid of Old Hundred. She's sure and steady enough, I'll warrant."

"You're the first one ever spoke a good word for her, Tom Hall, and I hope she won't take her spite out on you for it. I think engines are like women, and the better you treat 'em the worse they cut up. All aboard!"

Tom reached for the throttle, kept his eye on the conductor, and in another minute or two began his first job under anything but auspicious circumstances, having charge of a locomotive with a bad reputation, and running through a section of country as wild as any in the West and literally infested with outlaws.

Truly, the boy engineer's first job did not promise to be either a lasting or a pleasant one.

CHAPTER II.—The Girl in the Pink Sunbonnet.

The B. & G. railroad ran from Bulletville to Goring, a distance of a little more than a hundred miles, and its most important branch was that upon which Tom Hall was now running.

It started from Mountainville, which was a much larger place than Bulletville, the southern terminus, and ran fifteen miles through the wildest country to Bad Man's, a mining camp of considerable size, and with a reputation that was anything but good.

The company's offices, shops and principal yards were at Mountainville, and the boy engineer had done well to go there instead of to Bulletville to look for his first job, as there was little or nothing at the latter place.

Tom Hall was a handsome young fellow, with a frank, open, honest face and a look of determination which struck the superintendent at once and induced him to employ the boy.

"He's sure and steady, Stalker," he said, after Tom's departure, "and the very one to trust in this matter."

"And that's just why you shouldn't have given him Old Hundred, that beast of an engine, with a record worse than any jail-bird."

"And it's just why I did give him Old Hundred, and he'll make more out of her and manage her better than any man we've got. I like the boy, I tell you, Stalker, and you'll find that he's just the one we want."

Meanwhile, Tom had been having no great trouble in running his engine, the grade being generally level for the first two or three miles out of Mountainville, although there were several sharp curves and the roadbed was not in the best condition.

Four miles out the conductor gave him a signal and he stopped at a queer, rambling, one-story building, which was store, hotel, post-office and railroad station all in one.

"Well," said Babb, coming alongside the engine, "got sick o' your job yet, Tom?"

"Oh, I don't know!" answered the boy, in the careless manner that seemed so natural to him, paying less attention to Babb, however, than to a young girl who was approaching. She wore a calico dress, much faded and darned, a pink sunbonnet and a little cotton shawl, and carried a basket on her arm.

"I want to go on the train," said the girl, simply, to Babb. "Do I have to get a ticket, or do I pay on the cars?"

"Don't make any difference," said Babb. "Take a seat anywhere, and I'll be along after we get to going again. We won't stop long, Tom."

Babb walked toward the store, and the girl passed on, Tom's eyes following her.

"She's awfully pretty. I wonder who she is?" he mused. "Just a country girl, I suppose, but as pretty as a picture."

Suddenly, as the girl was about to pass him on her way to the passenger-car, one of the rough fellows lounging about the place, evidently a miner by his dress, seized her and, with a hoarse laugh, attempted to kiss her.

She struggled and tried to escape, but the man only laughed the more and roared:

"No, you don't, my beauty! I know a pretty face when I see one, and I'm goin' to have a kiss from them red lips under that there sunbonnet, blowed if I ain't."

He had the girl's free hand in his one great paw, he pushed back the sunbonnet with the other, and was about to kiss her, despite her protests, when he met with an unexpected hindrance. Tom had seen the whole affair, and, leaping from the cab and springing to the rescue, he gave the man a stunning blow with his hard, well-knit fist and staggered him, following it up with a second blow in the face which caused him to gasp, release his hold and fall back a step or two.

"Who in tarnation are you, and what the deuce are you doing?" the man growled angrily, clapping his hand to his belt. "I'll fill you full o' holes fur that!"

"Oh, I don't know!" said Tom, and the man found himself suddenly looking down a pistol barrel. "I can shoot as well as you. Take your hand away from your belt."

"Who are you, anyhow?" muttered the man, falling back still further.

"Tom Hall, engineer of Old Hundred, of Bad Man's Branch, if you want to know," said Tom, quietly. "Do you know this young lady? Have you any right to kiss her?"

"I allus kiss pooty gals when I see 'em," returned the man, with an uneasy laugh, backing away, but making no further attempt to draw his weapon.

"Not without her consent, while I'm about. Beg the young lady's pardon now, or I'll make a porous plaster of your ugly skin."

"No, no, it is not at all necessary," said the girl, who had crept close to Tom. "Let him go. I know I shall not be further molested," and then, in a whisper. "Thank you ever so much. You do not know how great a service you have rendered me."

Then she hurried away and entered the car, unassisted, while Tom, turning to the bully, said:

"The lady says it isn't necessary and I've no more to say, but if I find you doing anything

like this again, I'll have something to say about it. Do you understand?"

Babb and the brakeman were at Tom's side, but the man, who was evidently a braggart, made no further show of fight.

"You're a cool one, Tom. Do you know who that fellow is? He's a hard case, he is."

"Oh, I don't know!" and Tom put away his pistol. "Ready to go on, Mr. Babb?"

"That's Pete Budd, one of the hardest cases in the hull State. You called his bluff first-rate, and you're the only man that ever did. That ain't the first pretty girl he's kissed when he's taken a notion, and nobody ever said anything before."

"He won't do it when I'm around if the girl objects, no matter if she wears an old calico dress and a pink sunbonnet, or silks and diamonds," returned Tom, walking forward, the girl in the window having turned away.

"Well, what do you think of Old Hundred for a regular beast?" asked Babb, following.

"I don't think she's a beast at all. She's old, that's all, and requires care, but she's a good enough engine yet. I'll undertake to run her every trip, and get good work out of her."

"Well, I hope you will. All aboard! There's a tunnel a couple of miles ahead of you. Better go slow through that. After that you'll have a climb, and you'll have to keep shoveling in coal all the time. It's a pity they didn't give you a fireman. There's too much work for one man."

"Oh, I don't know!" and Tom, now in his seat, looked back a moment to see if he could catch a glimpse of the girl in the pink sunbonnet, and then, as Babb gave him his signal, opened the throttle and resumed the run to the end of the branch.

Finally Tom saw ahead of him the tunnel that Babb had spoken of, but he did not slacken speed, as he was going slow enough to keep any headway on as it was, and he did not wish to be stalled in the tunnel.

When he ran out at the other end, a distance of about an eighth of a mile, he beheld a magnificent mountain prospect, the road overlooking a deep valley with a town at the bottom, while beyond were ranges upon ranges of mountains, cloud-capped and solemn, with a solitary peak in the far distance, crowned with eternal snow.

Through the valley ran a river whose course could be traced here and there among the hills, while now and then on the lower slopes were little settlements, looking like toy villages in the distance.

The view was so grand and so unexpected after the run through the tunnel that Tom was taken quite by surprise, and for a few moments almost forgot his situation until the approach of a sharp curve around a dizzy precipice warned him that he must attend strictly to business and not be carried away by the grandeur of the scenery.

After rounding the curve and getting away from the precipice, Tom presently saw the entrance of a second tunnel at some little distance and made up his mind to go through it without diminishing his speed, as he had done in the first instance.

There was a decided curve just before the entrance was reached, however, and Tom was obliged to slow up, but he was about to increase his speed again when, glancing along the track, he saw an obstruction consisting of three or four

old sleepers, while in front of it, driven partly under a sleeper to hold the barricade in place, were two broken rails.

Tom threw in his throttle in an instant and sounded an alarm, when, just as he came to a stop, not ten feet from the obstruction, a man with a high-crowned slouched hat and carrying a pistol in one hand sprang up and shouted:

"Jump down out o' that, sonny, and chuck up your hands. It's a bad man what's talking to yer."

"Oh, I don't know!" said Tom, quietly. "I am something of a ban man myself," and then, suddenly whipping his revolver out of his loose shirt where no one would have expected it to be, he sent a bullet straight through the crown of the man's hat.

CHAPTER III.—What Happened on the Way Back.

Astonished at the unexpected resistance he had met with, the man suddenly turned and fled into the tunnel at full speed, Tom firing a second shot which took off his hat and elicited a yell of genuine terror from him.

Babb, the brakeman and half of the passengers now came forward, curious to know the cause of the shouts they had heard and why the train had stopped at such an out-of-the-way place.

"What is it, Tom, a hold-up?" asked Babb.

"No, only a throw-down. There was one bad man here just now, but I proved to be worse, and he threw down his chips and got out."

"Did you exchange shots?"

"No, I fired twice. You'll find his hat in the tunnel. Better get this stuff off the track, Babb, if you expect to make Bad Man's tonight. Got any crowbars or anything to work with?"

"We'll get out of here all right," said Babb. "Here, boys, yank out these broken rails, and then we'll use them as levers to get the pile of ties off the tracks."

It took a few minutes only to remove the obstruction, as all the men took part in the work, and then Tom said to Babb:

"I'm going to light up going through this tunnel. There may be some one hiding there, and the headlight will show them up. Keep a lookout all of you and the instant you hear me, too, you shoot."

Tom now came back to the cab and said:

"I won't go too fast, Babb. You fellows keep a sharp lookout for suspicious characters, and I'll do the same. All ready?"

"Yes," and the conductor hurried the last passenger inside and waved his hand, Tom pulling out the throttle and going ahead at a fair speed.

The tunnel was longer than the other one and there were two turns in it, but the powerful headlight sent a strong glare down the track and along the walls, and if there were any desperadoes ahead Tom did not see them, and it was more than likely that the man whose hat he had shot off had escaped at the further end.

He saw no one and was not molested while going through the tunnel, and at the end of another mile he stopped at another queer little mountain settlement to take on a passenger and give Babb a chance to run to a house a hundred yards away and deliver a message to a man sitting on the doorstep, smoking a pipe.

"Reckon the men up at the mine ain't been paid yet this month," Tom heard one man say to another as he was oiling up, waiting for Babb.

"No, or they'd 've sent a better injine and a older injineer. If Jim Dobbs and his gang was to hold her up, this young feller'd lay right down."

"Oh, I don't know!" said Tom, turning, the long-nosed oil-can in his hand. "Do they often have hold-ups on the branch?"

The man stared at him, having apparently not suspected that he had heard, and then they laughed and walked away.

"Maybe the bad man I met a mile or so back was Jim Dobbs," mused Tom. "So they send money to the men, and these pleasant gentlemen help themselves to it, do they? Well, they won't do it while I'm in charge of Old Hundred, I can tell them."

The conductor presently returned and said, carelessly:

"You'll have some climbing to do, Tom. Gettin' tired of the old girl?"

"I don't know. I think not. Any more stops?"

"Not unless somebody hails us. There's nobody getting off. That fellow whose hat you shot off was Jim Dobbs, I expect. The storekeeper says he's been seen hanging about. He must have thought we had something worth while on board."

"I suppose so," said Tom.

"Any fool knows they wouldn't send Old Hundred to pull the pay-train. She's likely enough to stop herself without bein' held up, only them fellers can't never tell when she's going to do it."

"She isn't stopping this trip, unless on flag or at the regular places," said Tom, drily, climbing into the cab. "Ready?"

"Yes. You'll have fun now, I'm thinking."

Three miles further they crossed a river on a shaky bridge, then they passed an extensive swamp, and finally came to the end of the branch, a distance of fifteen miles in all, and reached Bad Man's.

The station was store, hotel, post-office, freight-house and many other things, and the platform was crowded with rough-looking men, inquisitive women and a swarm of half-grown children of both sexes, to whom the arrival of a train seemed to be a great event.

When the passengers began to get off, the crowd on the platform evinced a certain degree of interest, but this soon died out, and before the girl in the pink sunbonnet left, being the last to do so, the crowd had greatly diminished.

"I wonder what they were waiting for?" thought Tom. "Some of them looked disappointed."

He saw Babb and the girl walking toward the station and felt annoyed, though he could not tell why, but as they went on a man came from the station, spoke to the girl, took her basket and walked away with her, while Babb went inside. He returned in a quarter of an hour, entered the cab, looked around and then said, nervously:

"Say, Tom, do you know what we've done?"

"Nothing bad, I hope," said the boy, quietly.

"Bad? I should say not. You've fetched the special through and the men's money was in the car and nobody suspected it."

"The money to pay the mine hands you mean?"

"Yes, and when Pete Budd and Jim Dobbs and that gang knows it they'll have it in for you."

"Did you know we had the money with us?"

"No. Wouldn't have run if I had. Didn't know a thing about it neither till I seen the mine boss just now. He told me he had it, and that a messenger fetched it up."

"When do we run back, Babb?" asked Tom, carelessly.

"About an hour and a half. Think you can run the old vixen down them steep grades?"

"Yes, if the brakes hold. I'll have a look at them, but you mustn't go to calling the engine names. She brought you here safe enough. What do we take down?"

"About six carloads of ore."

"That'll be enough. I'll run into the yard, I suppose? I shall want something to eat before I start."

"All right. You'll have time enough. You'll have an hour and a half anyhow, but I'll let you know."

Tom spent part of his time in looking about the town which, while it was not much more than a mining camp, had a few fine buildings, among which were the mine company's office, a hotel, a bank and a few pretentious residences, these being all together apart from the rest of the town, and forming a section of their own.

When it was time to return Tom saw that he had several passengers to take back, the coach being placed next to the baggage car as before, while the ore cars brought up the rear. He was in the cab waiting for the signal from Babb, who was hustling about on the platform, when a young lady in a rich black silk dress, with a plumed hat on her head, leaning on the arm of a distinguished-looking old gentleman, came out of the station and walked toward the passenger car.

Tom caught the young lady's eye for an instant, and then she turned her head and went on.

"That's funny," he muttered. "It can't be possible, but they look as much alike as can be. By George, I believe it is the same. That's the girl in the pink sunbonnet, and she was the messenger; she had the money in her basket! Well, well, I'll take as good care of her going down as I did coming up, for this is my first job and I must not make a muddle of it."

He saw Babb assist the young lady and her companion into the car, and then in a few moments the signal was given and he started off, bound to do his best.

He was alone in the cab, the brakes were all set the train just running upon a steep down-grade with a number of dangerous curves upon it, and he was standing up, watching the road ahead, when suddenly, before he was aware, two men sprang across the tender, leaped into the cab and seized him, one on each side.

"Now, Mr. Tom Hall," cried one in his ear, "this is the last run you'll ever make."

"Yes," hissed the other, "for we're going to throw you off the engine, and Old Hundred will have another victim!"

CHAPTER IV.—The End of the First Run.

"Well," he said calmly, "what do you want? What can I do for you?"

"Did you ever hear tell of Pete Budd?" asked

the man whom Tom had struck. "Well, that's me, and I never allow no man to strike me and live."

"My name's Jim Dobbs," said the other man, "and I'm a bad man to monkey with."

"And I'm Tom Hall," said the boy, "and if any man tries to interfere with my business, or insults a lady in my presence, he's going to get hurt."

"And we're going to chuck you off the train fust," said Budd, "and after that you can do as you durn please."

"I've nothing to say about it, I suppose?"

"No, you haven't," laughed Dobbs.

"You grab him all around, Jim," said Budd, "and I'll let go. Then you can chuck him off."

Just as Dobbs was about to throw both arms about him, Tom raised his knee, with sudden and terrible force, and caught the man in the pit of the stomach.

Dobbs gave a cry of pain, gasped for breath and released his hold of the boy, who quickly swung around his right arm and caught Budd a terrible blow on the point of the jaw.

Down went the man in an inert mass on the floor of the cab, and in an instant Tom had wheeled around, drawn his revolver and leveled it at Dobbs.

"Get up on that seat," he commanded, pointing to where he usually sat.

Dobbs obeyed, and as he did so Tom quickly snatched the revolver out of his hip-pocket.

"Sit still, or I'll make a colander of you," he said, reaching for the cord and whistling for brakes.

"You lie there!" he said to Budd, who was beginning to recover, "or I'll make a sieve of your hide. I'm a bad man myself, when I'm stirred up."

Tom then sounded the danger signal, and one of the brakeman appeared at the door of the baggage car.

"Smash her!" roared Tom, at the same time making motions to indicate what he wanted done, thinking that perhaps his voice might not be heard.

The brakeman understood, and broke open the door, when Tom shouted:

"Lay upon that front brake. I've got a couple of bad men here that need watching."

Budd attempted to rise, thinking that Dobbs might take the cue and attack the boy from behind.

"None of that!" cried Tom, springing back. "If you make another move I'll fire! Maybe I don't come from the West, where they live on gun-powder and lead, but I can shoot, fast enough."

Budd lay still, but as the train swung around the curve he suddenly reached out and seized Tom by the leg.

In a second the boy took the tip off the bully's ear, and said:

"Let go, or I'll take the top of your head off next!"

A quick glance showed him that Dobbs was in the act of springing upon him, and in a moment he put a bullet through the top of the man's hat.

"Sit still, Dobbs!" he shouted.

The brakes began to bite, but there was still some little steam on, as Tom had not had a chance to shut it all off, and this gave them more speed than was safe.

"This way, Jack!" he shouted to the brakeman.

"Get a rope or a strap or something and tie up these bundles of damaged goods."

The brakeman started across the tender, when Budd made a sudden dash and, as the train swung around another curve, rolled out of the cab.

Tom uttered a cry of alarm, and cast a swift glance backward, as he swept on, expecting to see the man mangled by the wheels.

At this point, however, there was a steep bank, almost a precipice, in fact, on the side where Budd had fallen.

Forty feet down, caught by the branches of a little tree growing among the rocks, his clothes half torn from him, Tom saw him hanging, and breathed freer when he saw the man draw himself up and shake one fist in impotent rage.

"You didn't chuck him out, did you, Tom?" gasped the brakeman.

"No; he fell. It wasn't meant that he should break his neck in that way, I guess."

"What are you going to do with this fellow?"

"Search him," said Tom, shutting off steam, "and then stay here till we get to the river. I'll stop there."

"How did these two fellows get in here?" asked the brakeman, going through the outlaw's pockets.

"Don't know. They must have been in the smoker. Didn't you see them?"

"No."

"You lie! You let us in. You knowed what we was about," said Dobbs.

"That'll do, Dobbs," said Tom. "It won't help you to try and make Jack your partner in this business. Got a rope, Jack?"

"No, only the bell-cord."

"That won't do. Well, watch him. I say, is he likely to have friends along the road?"

"Yes. Everybody's afraid of him most, on account of his name, and he's got lots of friends."

"Oh, I see. Well, then, I won't stop till I get to Mountainville, except at the bridge, and then we'll turn Mr. Jim Dobbs over to the police."

"Look here, boy, the wuss you make it for me, the wuss it'll be for yourself. I'd advise ye to let me off quiet, at the next stop, and I won't say nothin', but if ye try to cut up rustly it'll be wuss for ye in the end."

"Never mind telling me what I'm to do, Mr. Dobbs," said Tom, quietly. "I'm running this affair to suit myself. No more guns on him, Jack?"

"No."

"Nor knives?"

"No."

"All right. Take this gun and march him into the baggage car. It's too crowded in here."

"Get a move on you, Jim," said the brakeman, leveling the pistol at the outlaw's head.

Dobbs slid off his seat, and Tom began to slow up, having now run upon the level and nearing the river.

Dobbs crossed to the tender, climbed up and began making his way over the coal to the baggage car, followed by the brakeman.

Suddenly, as they passed a lot of thick underbrush, Dobbs gave a leap, left the tender, struck among the bushes and disappeared.

"He prefers breaking his neck that way to having it broken for him," said Tom, drily. "Well, we've got rid of both of them and I'm not sorry.

though I would like to see them locked up and out of harm's way."

They stopped at the bridge, and then Tom ran on, completed his trip and arrived in Mountainville, and said to Rugg, who came up to the engine, as he came to a standstill:

"Well, Mr. Rugg, here I am again. Got another run for me to-morrow, I suppose?"

"H'm! you ain't sick of it?"

"No. By the way, you'd better let me keep Old Hundred."

"Oh, you can keep her," muttered Rugg, with a half laugh, "that is to say, if she don't blow up, or run off the track, or turn over. Most injineers is satisfied with one trip on that fiend of an old tub."

"Never you mind Old Hundred, she's all right," said Tom, jumping down, "and I'll wager she'll go as good as anything you've got in the yard when I'm through fixing her up, but I've got to have a fireman."

"Tell the truth, Tom," said Ruggs, lowering his voice, "I don't believe I can get you one. I didn't want to send you out alone to-day, but none o' the boys would go. They all know that old vixen's reputation."

The passengers having all left the train, and the ore cars having been left behind on a siding, Tom now took his train to the yard, uncoupled his engine and housed it, putting it in order before starting home.

He met Babb in the street and asked:

"I say, Mr. Babb, who was the young lady in black silk, with the fine old gentleman?"

"That? Why, she's Vira Wells, daughter of the president of the mine company, and niece of Stalker, the treasurer."

In a few moments they met Mr. Blauvelt in company with Rugg, and the former said:

"Tom, you can make that run every day."

"Thank you, sir. My first job isn't my last, then."

CHAPTER V.—Old Hundred Up to Her Old Tricks.

Tom was on his way to the little hotel where he had been staying since his arrival in Mountainville, the day previous, when he met the red-headed office boy whom he had first seen that afternoon.

"Hello, Tom Hall, the engineer!" said the boy, stopping in front of him.

"Hello yourself, Dick," said Tom.

"How did you know my name?"

"Heard the super call you Richard."

"Well, that's all right. Some fellers would have called me redhead, or carrots, or Red Dick, or any old thing to make me mad."

"You're not responsible for the color of your hair, Dick, and why should I call attention to something that you know all about?"

"Where are you going?"

"To the Mountain House to get my supper."

"Going to stay there steady?"

"I don't know. If I can't do better, I will."

"It's a, cheeky thing, mebbey, but I'm going to ask you to come around to my house and board. It won't cost you as much as at the hotel, and my mother's a bang-up good cook and house-

keeper. There's me and two little kids to take care of, and it would help her first-rate to have you in the house. We've got a spare room, and it's no slouch."

"I'll come around after supper and talk to her, Dick. Give me the address."

"Why can't you come now and have tea with us?"

"She won't be expecting me, Dick, and it may put her out. No, I'll run around later."

"All right. I'll come to the hotel for you. I'm going part of the way there now. I'll go with you."

"All right, Dick; glad to have you."

The younger boy chatted upon different matters, and finally, as they reached the hotel, asked abruptly:

"Say, Tom, do you think you could get me a job as your fireman?"

"Could you do it? It's hard work, Dick."

"Well, I'm willing to learn. I don't want to stick in the office. I want to be an engineer. You gotta be a fireman first, of course, and that's what I want. I had to take the job I got, but if I can get with you I'll chuck it up in a second."

"But if you go with me, Dick, you'll have to run on Old Hundred, and you know what they say about her."

"I don't care what they say about her. They're only a lot of old women. If you're satisfied, I don't give a rap."

"Oh, I'm satisfied, Dick."

"You ain't afraid of her?"

"Not a bit."

"Then I ain't, neither. And you'll give me the job?"

"If your mother is willing and Rugg will take you."

"All right, then, see you later. So-long!" said the red-headed boy all in a breath, and then he ran down the street like the wind.

It was all arranged, and when Tom took out his engine the next day, an hour or two earlier than on his first trip, Dick went with him as fireman.

They made a stop at the first queer little settlement out from Mountainville, as there were one or two passengers to take on, and Babb had to deliver a parcel to the storekeeper, and then talk about the weather, the rumors of a strike among the miners at Bad Man's and a few general topics.

Finally Tom blew a shrill whistle, which startled the echoes far and near, and, as Babb came running out of the store to see what was the matter, said:

"See here, Babb, are we running this train on the road's time or yours? How long do you stop at a flag station, anyhow?"

"Who's running this train?" snapped the conductor, "me or you?"

"Well, I'm running the best part of it. We're supposed to make Bad Man's in an hour, ain't we? We'll do it, I don't think, if we stop ten minutes at every little hole along the road."

"I'm bossing this train," said Babb, nervously, "and I'm going to stop all I want to."

"Oh, I don't know!" said Tom, carelessly. "I've got orders as well as you, and I know the time we ought to make."

"How do you know, a new man on the road,

with an old freak of an injine what nobody'll take hold of?"

"Blauvelt gave me a few points," said Tom, quietly.

"All aboard!" yelled Babb, turning red and hurrying away.

"That's the time you got the drop on him," chuckled Dick. "I like to see that old crank come up with it."

"Never mind making remarks, Dick," said Tom. "You aren't paid for that. Babb is all right."

"But he's got a bad reputation. He can't get on any of the regular trains."

"So's this engine got a reputation, but we don't care for that. I'll get good work out of her and out of Babb, too. It's only knowing how to treat 'em both right that'll do it."

They left the town, passed through the first tunnel, and were hurrying along toward the second, when Tom, actuated by some impulse, he knew not what, shot a quick glance out of the little window in front.

He turned suddenly cold and white, and jammed in the throttle, at the same time whistling for brakes.

There was a man lying on the track, bound hand and foot and gagged, not a hundred feet distant, and they were on a down grade.

To Tom's horror, neither the shutting off of the steam nor the application of the brakes seemed to have the slightest effect on their speed, the train seeming to rush forward in spite of everything.

"She's up to her old tricks," gasped Tom, as he watched in vain for any slackening of speed. "If I didn't want her to stop, she'd do it in a minute."

The distance between him and the man on the track became frightfully less every instant, and the cold sweat stood in huge drops on the boy's forehead as he realized the horrible peril of the man before him.

"My gracious! will nothing stop her?" he groaned, as he sounded a shrill alarm, and fixed his eyes on the track ahead. Nearer and nearer they glided, and Tom put his hand over his eyes to shut out the dreadful sight, expecting in a few moments to run into the tunnel, leaving a blood-stained track behind him.

Tom covered his face with his hands, expecting in another moment to hear the awful crunch of the wheels over the body of the poor unfortunate, when, all of a sudden, there was another sound, and then a sudden shock and the engine came to a dead stop, not gradually, but upon the instant.

"The brakes have taken hold," he thought, as he took away his hands from his face and looked out.

Then he hurried outside, ran along the footboard, jumped down upon the bumpers, just in front of the headlight, and saw that he had stopped within six inches of the man on the track.

"Hurry up, Dick!" he shouted. "Fetch a knife or something. She may take it into her head to rush ahead again before we can get this fellow off the track."

Dick, Babb, the brakemen, and several passengers came hurrying forward, and the man was speedily released and set upon his feet, then

his bonds were cut and the gag removed from his mouth.

Tom looked at him, trembled perceptibly, and said:

"You had a narrow squeak of it. My engine seemed possessed to run you down."

"You wouldn't have cared if it, I suppose, Tom," said the other. "You know me, don't you? I've changed somewhat, but not much."

Tom flushed, but said nothing, and returned to his place on the engine, followed by Dick.

"That villain again!" he muttered, careless of Dick's presence. "Shall I never get out of his clutches? Old Hundred must have known, and wanted to get rid of him for my sake."

"All aboard!" shouted Babb, and Tom opened the throttle, but to his astonishment, the engine refused to move.

The brakes were off and the throttle was open, but the engine was stalled, and this was what had caused it to stop, and not the shutting off the steam and the putting on the the brakes.

"What's the matter, Tom?" called out Babb. "Stalled!"

"H'm! you won't stick up for Old Hundred now."

"Yes," said Tom to himself, "for the old engine has saved me from taking a life."

CHAPTER VI.—Two Sides to a Boy's Character.

After about ten minutes' work, Tom had his engine in proper condition and said to Babb:

"All right, Mr. Babb. I'm ready to go on now, and I'll promise not to have any more detentions."

Three miles further they crossed the river on a shaky bridge, and Tom said:

"That bridge is going to give way some day if it isn't fixed. I can feel it shake as I go over it. They've no business to leave it in that shape, taking heavy loads over it as they do."

"The mine company won't fix it, because they don't own the branch, and the B. & G. won't do it, because they say there isn't travel enough over the road to pay for it," said Dick.

"Some day, when there's a lot of cars loaded with ore running over it, the whole business will go down, and then there'll be a suit for damages. I'm going to speak about it myself."

When Tom reached Bad Man's, the mine boss came up to the engine and said:

"You'd better wait till about five o'clock, and then I can send down a big load, ten cars of stuff."

"How many can you send down now?"

"Well, it's noon now, and the men are at dinner."

"I'm not going to take down any ten carloads," said Tom, decisively. "The bridge over Bad River would never stand it, and the whole business would be dumped to the bottom, bridge, cars and everything. I'll take down six carloads, but not another pound."

"But my orders are to send them."

"Then you'll have to get another engineer, for I won't take any such risk. Whatever load I start with I've got to take through, for there isn't a siding between here and Mountainville."

"Don't the road tell you to take all you can?"

"No, it's doesn't, but if it did I could not take your ten carloads. I'll take six and come back."

"But you can't run things to suit yourself like that," said the man angrily. "I've got to get that stuff down to the smelting works, and I can't lose any time over it, either."

"You've got to, then. You know there's no telegraph between here and the main line, and I've got to use my own judgement. That tells me to look out for the welfare of the road, and I'm doing it. Blauvelt will uphold me in this. Give me your six carloads, and I'll run 'em through now, and come back for more."

In the course of two hours Tom left Bad Man's with six carloads, and made the run in safety, going to the superintendent's office, after housing his engine and making himself presentable.

"Mr. Blauvelt," he said, "the bridge over Bad River needs repairing. It shook with me yesterday, and it shook worse today. They wanted me to bring an extra load, and I wouldn't do it. Shall I go back for the rest?"

"No, and don't take more than you think you can manage at any time. I know the bridge is bad, but it's a question as to whether we or the mining company ought to do the repairing."

"Why don't you sell the branch and let them manage it?"

Mr. Blauvelt look at Tom in astonishment, laughed and then said:

"You were made for more than an engineer, Tom. You were cut out for a railroad manager."

"Oh, I don't know. I'll get through my first job before I try anything else, I guess. Good-day. I'll get orders for tomorrow, I suppose," and Tom bowed himself out.

The next morning Tom received orders to make two trips to the mines that day, and to take up two carloads of supplies on the first trip, which would be at ten in the morning. He was ready to leave, when he saw Vira Wells and the old gentleman, whom he took to be her father, alight from a carriage and walk toward the train.

Without a word he sprang from the cab, hurried toward the young lady, touched his cap and said:

"I beg your pardon, Miss Vira, but are you going up to the mining camp?"

"Yes," said the young lady, while the old gentleman looked surprised, and stared hard at Tom.

"I would not advise it," said the boy, eagerly. "However, it may be safe enough. Were you thinking of returning by the railroad or by the longer carriage road?"

"By the railroad on the last trip down. It's very exciting."

"Don't do it, Miss Vira," pleaded Tom. "It isn't safe."

"But it must be, if you take the risk. They say that an engineer won't take as much risk as other men."

"It may be safe, but I don't want you to risk it," said Tom. "Don't come down with the ore. The bridge over Bad River is shaky, and may go down, and I would not have you risk your life for worlds."

"You take a strange interest in my daughter's affairs, young man," said the old gentleman, haughtily. "It seems hardly in keeping for one in your station of life."

"I can't help it, sir," said Tom, without a trace of his usual careless manner, being now in terrible earnest. "It would be safe enough to return by the ordinary train, but not on the overloaded train that I shall bring back tonight, and ments he departed with the superintendent's note. I beg that she will not attempt it."

"I will take your advice, for I know you are to be trusted," said Vira. "Father, this is the young gentleman I told you of."

"Yes, yes, to be sure," and Mr. Wells appeared to be more cordial in his manner, "but if you go up you will have to return by any train that the road chooses to send. It is hardly likely that they will dispatch a special train for your benefit."

At that moment the conductor came forward and Tom was about to go back to the engine when two men approached, one a sheriff's officer and the other the man who had been found on the track the day before.

"Come, Tom," said Babb.

"Not so quick," said the stranger. "The young man won't take the train out today. He is not a fit person to talk to ladies and gentlemen. He is a thief!"

Tom gasped as if struck. Vira Wells turned pale, and Mr. Wells said severely:

"Young man, what is your answer to this charge?"

Tom turned in an instant, shot out his fist, took his accuser full in the face and stretched him on the platform.

"That is my answer!" he said.

CHAPTER VII.—An Exciting Start and Finish.

"Here, here, young man, that's no way to prove your innocence," said the sheriff's officer to Tom, who now stood over his fallen accuser, his arms folded and not a muscle moving, but with a look in his eyes that plainly showed that he was in a dangerous mood and would brook no trifling.

"It is the way to resent an insult, sir, and the only way which this man understands," said Tom, in quiet but firm tones. "I have nothing to do with him whatever. Have you any business with me?"

"Why, I understand that you were to be held, pending the arrival of requisition papers; that you had committed some offense for which you could be arrested."

"You have no warrant for my arrest, then, on any charge?"

"No."

"And this man did not specify the offense?"

"He said that you were a thief, and that you were wanted."

"He lies, I am not a thief. I do not care to talk about the matter, but will say that this man has long been my enemy, and that he will do anything to injure me. I defy him to produce any evidence on which I can be held."

"He robbed the Crooked River & Winding Valley Railroad of forty thousand dollars," said Tom's accuser, making no effort to rise. "He's a born thief and would rob any one. You'd better not keep him on this road or he'll rob that, too."

Dick had been listening attentively, and now,

jumping from the cab, he came forward and said, excitedly:

"Look here, Mr. Sharply, you don't want to have anything to do with that fellow or believe anything he says. Why, do you know what a sneak he is? Tom Hall saved his life yesterday, and he never thanked him nor nothing, and never said a word about this business, and now, today, he brings it up just to get Tom chucked out of his job. I wouldn't believe him under oath, and if he'll stand up I'll knock him down myself."

"That's right," said Babb. "Tom did help the fellow yesterday, and he hadn't a word to say about this matter."

Mr. Wells now stepped up and said in a tone of decision:

"We can't delay the train while this unknown man talks on general subjects, Mr. Sharply. If it is a question of bail, you can call on me to any amount. I will be responsible for him, and so will Blauvelt and Stalker and every man of any importance in Mountainville."

Away went the train, Tom in his place and attending strictly to business, the success of the run being all he thought of.

They ran on with little or no stops, and when Tom reached the bridge at Bad River he noticed that it shook more than ever when he ran over it.

As they were running in at Bad Man's Tom noticed a considerably larger crowd than usual around the station, and saw at once that there was an excitement of some sort.

Groups of men stood on the track and on both sides of it for some distance, and the platform was packed with men and boys, while the doors and windows of the station and of the houses near it were filled with women. The boy engineer sounded a shrill warning, and began to slow up sooner than he would have done ordinarily, as he had no desire to hurt any one, and he could not have avoided doing it if he had kept on as usual.

Some of the men on the track left it, but many remained where they were, and there were at least twenty men just in front of Number One Hundred when it finally stopped.

Two or three excited men attempted to climb into the cab, but Tom stood at the door on one side and Dick on the other, while Tom said:

"See here, this is not a passenger coach, and we are not going out now, anyhow. You musn't get up here."

"Well, I'm just a-goin' to, young feller," growled one big, shaggy, red-headed man of almost giant proportions, "and I just don't guess you ain't goin' ter say nothin' about it."

"Oh, I don't know," said Tom, putting his foot on the man's hand. "I think I'll have a little to say about it."

"Ye c'n say all ye like, but it won't do you no—ouch! Take yer hoof off'n my hand."

"Oh, is that your hand? Excuse me," and Tom threw more of his weight on the member.

The man yelled and tried to seize the boy's leg with his free hand, to drag him out of the cab. Tom gave him a smart tap on the nose with his disengaged foot, turned all his weight on the imprisoned hand, and said:

"Well, do you want me to let up on that paw of yours, or do you want me to use stronger ar-

guments?" and the boy put his hand inside his shirt.

"Ouch! let up, you young whelp!" howled the man.

"Not for that, I won't. You'll have to be more civil before I let up."

"Holy smoke! take yer foot off my hand, for goodness sake," yelled the other, and Tom removed his foot and gave the fellow a quick push alongside the jaw with it that sent him sprawling on the platform.

The men were crowding up the steps, and three of them seized Mr. Wells and dragged him down to the platform.

"Stop! Release that old man! I'll shoot the first man that lays a finger on him!"

There was instant silence, and the crowd saw Tom Hall standing in the cab with a pistol leveled at each man in it, apparently, for every one of them gasped and shrank back as if he was the one of all at whom the boy took aim.

CHAPTER VIII.—Old Hundred Saves the Train.

"Stop where you are!" shouted Tom. "I see through your game. You're a lot of outlaws, the most of you, and never worked in a mine or anywhere else in your lives. Show me a decent miner and let me ask him if Pete Budd and Jim Dobbs are the kind of men he works with."

"You bet they ain't," said a man stepping forward, "but we don't want our wages cut down."

"Your pay has not been cut down," said Vira, in a clear voice, "and whoever says it has, been telling a falsehood."

"Well, we heard it was going to be."

"Who told you?" asked Tom.

"It was all over the camp this morning."

"And you listened to these lies, allowed yourselves to be led by the nose by a gang of outlaws, who want to rob and destroy property and then you lose your jobs and they get off and laugh at you."

Tom saw the mine boss and, beckoning to him, asked:

"Have you had any notice of the reduction in wages?"

"No, but I heard the rumor as others did, and couldn't get the men to work."

"You couldn't telegraph, I suppose."

"No, there's no line to the junction."

"That's so, I forgot that. Couldn't you make the men wait till you could hear from Mr. Wells?"

"No; they were crazy and swore all sorts of things."

"There hasn't been any reduction. Ask Mr. Wells."

"The young man is right," said the old gentleman. "There has been no talk of a reduction. It is, as Tom Hall says, a plot on the part of these scoundrels to get up an excitement and rob and plunder to their hearts' content, and only for his coolness they would have begun on the train, and goodness only knows where they would have stopped."

The men slunk away, and in five minutes the station was deserted, except by the few habitual loungers who were always to be found around it.

"Well, I was to make two trips today," said

Tom to the boss, "but I don't know that I can after this fuss."

"I can give you the extra load you would not take yesterday, and if you'll wait till afternoon I can give you a couple of cars more."

"What do you say, Mr. Babb? Shall we make two trips or one?"

"Rugg said I'd better make two, so I guess we'd better take what there is and come back for more."

"That's all right. When do you expect to leave?"

"In an hour."

"All right."

Vira Wells now stepped alongside the engine, and Tom, getting down, touched his cap and said:

"I think you'd better go back by this train, unless you are staying over. It will be safer."

"You were very brave," said the girl, "and bright, too, for you saw through the schemes of these men before anyone. It is splendid to be so brave."

"I know someone who was braver, for the somebody was a woman, and yet she ran the risk of robbery and insult to take the men's pay to them and cheat the outlaws, who were waiting to plunder the train if the regular messenger had been seen."

Vira blushed deeply and then said:

"How did you know it was I? I thought the disguise was perfect."

"I did not say it was you, I said it was somebody," said Tom, with a quiet smile. "All the same, I think she was very brave, and I admire her courage. She showed it today, too, when she defended her father against the attacks of those outlaws."

"Don't say a word about the girl in the sun-bonnet," whispered Vira, as Mr. Wells approached. "Father does not know. He thought a real country girl was the messenger."

In an hour Tom was ready to return, having five carloads of ore to take back, not too heavy a load, ordinarily, although Tom somehow felt that it was more than he ought to carry, considering the condition of the bridge. He kept thinking of the matter, whether he would or not, and by the time he was ready to start he had resolved to advise Vira not to go with him.

"I'm sure something is going to happen," he mused, half aloud, as he climbed into the cab, "and I would not have her hurt for the world."

"Do you mean Old Hundred?" asked Dick.

"No, I mean Young Eighteen," laughed Tom.

"I didn't know there was any such engine on the road."

"I wasn't thinking of an engine, Dick. In fact, I didn't know I was speaking out loud."

"Well, you were, and you do it lots. I could find out a lot about you if I was to listen."

"Perhaps you might and perhaps you might not. I do hope she won't come. I'm going to give that bridge a good inspection, anyhow, before I run over it."

"Don't you think the bridge is safe, Tom?"

"No, I don't."

"And you don't want Vira Wells to run any risk?"

"That's it."

"You're kind of stuck on her, ain't you, Tom?"

The boy engineer laughed and said:

"Never you mind whether I am or not. Hello, here they come!"

Tom meant to speak to Vira, but first Babb and then someone else claimed his attention, and when he was free the young lady had boarded the train.

"It may be that I am extra nervous," he mused, "and there is no danger. All the same, I won't go over the bridge till I have a good look at it."

He was all ready to start, and Babb presently gave him the signal and away he went at a good speed, and for a time he thought no more of his fears. They sped over the hills and down the slopes, along the marsh land and then approached the river, making no stops and running smoothly enough, Tom really being surprised at the excellent manner in which the engine with a bad name was behaving. He meant to stop at the bridge long enough to make a thorough investigation and not merely for the few moments of his usual stop, but, as he neared the river, the engine suddenly shot ahead as if of its own account, and they were almost at the bridge before he realized what had happened.

He sprang to the throttle, and with a sudden snort Old Hundred leaped forward and rushed at the bridge at a faster pace than Tom had ever known it to make. In a moment they were on the bridge, and he felt it shake, and for an instant his heart stood still. Straight across rushed the old engine, bearing passenger coaches and freight cars, going over with a rush which made everything blurred and indistinct. They seemed to have taken less than half the usual time to cross and Tom, moved by some strange impulse, looked back just as the last car cleared the structure, heard a crash and saw the whole fabric topple over and go plunging into the river. Old Hundred had taken things into her own hands and had saved the train.

CHAPTER IX.—Tom's Promotion.

Within a few moments after the bridge had been safely cleared Tom was able to bring his train to a stop with as little trouble as a rider could check a gentle horse. Babb now came running forward and, as several passengers put their heads out of the windows, he asked:

"What's the matter, Tom? What are you stopping on this side for? What made you run plumb across like that without stopping first?"

"It wasn't me at all, it was Old Hundred," said Tom, "and if you will look back you'll see why she did it."

Babb looked back, rubbed his eyes, opened his mouth, gave a gasp, whistled and said:

"Goshamighty! if the bridge ain't clear gone, as slick as a whistle. Thunder! it's a mercy we didn't go with it."

Passengers and brakemen came hurrying up to ask what had happened, and Tom called to the captain of the freight crew:

"Got all your men, Billy?"

"Aye!"

"And all your cars?"

"Every one."

"Nobody missing?"

"No, sir."

"All right, then. We may as well go ahead, Mr. Babb."

"Huh! I suspect we had. That's the last of the branch, though, unless the mining company buys it, for I don't guess the B. & G. will want to rebuild that bridge."

"What are we going to do, then, lose our jobs?" asked Dick of Tom.

"Oh, I don't know," said the boy engineer. "This isn't the whole B. & G. What's the matter with extending my job to the main line?"

"Will you take me with you, Tom?" asked Dick eagerly.

"Sure."

"But suppose you can't get an engine? Won't that bother you?"

"Oh, I don't know," and Tom smiled. "What's the matter with this one?"

When Tom reached the terminus, dropped off his ore cars and ran into the station to let off his passengers, Rugg came up and asked:

"Well, you'll make the other run, I suppose, seeing that you got through all right on this one?"

"No, I think not, unless you can give Old Hundred a pair of wings big enough to take her and the train across Bad River."

"What do you mean?" asked the other, with a puzzled look.

"Well, there's no bridge there now, and I don't know any way of getting over, except by flying or swimming or taking a boat, and I don't think either of those ways will suit Old Hundred."

"What! Has the bridge over Bad River gone? Good grief, how did that happen?"

"Just collapsed, as far as I could see. I didn't stop to investigate after I knew that our fellows were all right."

"But you got over safe?"

"It looks like it," laughed Tom.

"Well, well, I do declare! You're sure and steady, fast enough, just as Blauvelt said you were."

"And what about a new bridge?"

"Great snakes, don't ask me, Tom. I dunno nothin' about it. You'll have to ask Blauvelt about that, I reckon."

As Tom was about to run his engine into the yard, Vira Wells came up and said:

"You were right and you saved my life by running your train over the bridge at breakneck speed. I shall never forget it, and you shall lose nothing by the bridge being down."

"It wasn't me, at all, Miss Vira," said Tom, blushing. "It was Old Hundred. I tried to stop, but she just ran across full tilt. You must give all the credit to the engine."

"I prefer to give it to the engineer," said Vira, blushing in her turn, "and once more I thank you from the bottom of my heart."

"The super wants to see you in his office as soon as possible, Tom," said Rugg.

"All right. I'll fix up right away. You'd better come, Dick," for the boy was with him. "This may interest you as well as me and, anyhow, you'll want your old job back if there's no other."

"You're always thinking of others, Tom," said Dick, with a grateful look.

"Oh, I don't know, and, anyhow, that's all right. I'm not the only fellow in the world."

When Tom presented himself at Mr. Blauvelt's office the superintendent asked him a few questions concerning the accident at Bad River, and then said:

"When you took your first job as an engineer,

Tom, you were not supposed to be restricted to Bad Man's Branch. You were employed by the B. & G., and as the branch is not in good condition just at present we'll have to find you something to do elsewhere. You're sure and steady and just the one for the main line. How would you like that?"

"I am ready to go wherever I am sent, sir," answered Tom.

"Then you'd better get ready to go down to Bulletville and report to Hogg, the yard superintendent there. I'll let him know what you're to do. I think I'll give you an express."

"May I take Old Hundred with me?"

"What! That old tub? Why, she would never do to haul the express. She couldn't make the time."

"Will you let me try it once, and if she does it all right, keep her?"

"Yes, to be sure, but I don't think she can do it."

"And I do," said Tom earnestly. "Another thing, Mr. Blauvelt, may I take Dick as my fireman?"

"Certainly, if he wants to go."

"Then that is settled. When shall I take my engine down?"

"We'll say tomorrow morning at ten o'clock. I've got to go down myself, and we'll make up a special train."

When Tom was ready to take out the special train next morning, with his favorite engine to draw it, he was surprised to see Vira Wells and her father enter the parlor car, which had been substituted for the usual day-coach. Babb was the conductor and, as he came up to speak to the engineer, the latter said:

"Oh, I say, Mr. Babb, I suppose you'll have nothing to do now that the branch is temporarily abandoned. What about it?"

"Well, the super says that I'm just about as good as Old Hundred, and if you want her he doesn't see why I shouldn't go along," said Babb rather sourly.

"So you shall," said Tom, "and we'll prove that you are just as reliable as she is."

"But they say I've got a bad temper."

"And you said that of my engine. Suppose you prove the contrary, just as I have of Old Hundred."

"I'll try it, Tom," and as the old man hurried away Tom thought he detected a glimmer in his eye that was not usually there.

"A bad name hurts a man as well as a locomotive," mused the boy, "but I'll trust Babb because I believe he's got the right stuff in him, and he can be as sure and steady as anyone."

He was soon to learn that the trust he put in the irritable conductor was not misplaced.

CHAPTER X.—The Meeting in the Alley.

The special to Bulletville made good time, and Old Hundred fully sustained the good reputation which Tom had given her, responding promptly to his every motion and running smoothly and well, there being neither detention nor accident, and the run being made in as good time as had ever been made.

"I think you must have bewitched Old Hun-

dred, my boy," said the superintendent, coming up to the engine when Bulletville was reached. "I would have thought that you had the newest and best locomotive on the road if I had not known otherwise."

"She's all right, sir; only needs a little care, that's all," said Tom. "I'll engage to make as good time with her as any engine of her size, new or old, all in good time, and you'll give her as good a reputation as she has had the opposite."

"I think she'd have it if it depends on you," laughed Mr. Blauvelt, "for, unless she is the vixen that everyone says she is, she ought to do well for you out of sheer gratitude, and soon be as sure and steady as yourself."

"Thanks," said Tom simply, but blushing with pride.

"Remain around the station," continued the other, "and I will let you know shortly what arrangements we can make for you. I won't be gone more than two hours at the furthest."

Tom housed the engine, did what was required about the machine, had Dick bank the fires under his direction, and then said:

"Stay around the station, old chap, and if anyone wants me tell them I'll be back soon. I'm just going for a run around the town to see what it's like. I shan't be long."

"You couldn't let a fellow go with you, could you?" asked Dick.

"No, not very well. I'll want you on hand to tell them where I am. I shall just go up the main street a bit, that's all."

"You'll find more to see north of the post-office, as you strike on to the main street through the alley yonder, where that tumble-down old factory is," said Dick, pointing. "There isn't much to see the other way."

"All right; I'll go to the north. You hang around and I'll be back before so very long."

Tom left the yard, took the direction which Dick had indicated, and was halfway up the alley, at the entrance of which stood the queer, old dilapidated building the boy had spoken of, when from a rear door of the same a man came out and stood before him.

"Hello, Tom! You're down here, are you? Going to stay, or are you only on a run?"

"I don't know that it matters to you, Mr. Hank Hite, what I do," said Tom carelessly. "You tried to sidetrack me the other day; but I'm running on the main line all right, and I intend to keep on doing so."

"You're a fool to try and run up against me, Tom," said the other, placing himself squarely in the boy engineer's way. "I can put you in the way of a good thing, and you know it, and yet you kick."

"What you call good and what I do are different things. I call it a pretty bad thing myself."

"I'll upset you every time, if you're obstinate, but I'll make your fortune if you go in with me. You know the reputation you had in the East. Well, I'll pitch it up every time and ruin your chances of getting on here."

"I know the reputation you tried to give me, Hank Hite," said the boy fiercely, "but it was not mine, and I shall live it down in spite of all you do. I tell you, I will have nothing to do with you, and if you annoy me I will see that you are put where you cannot."

"Oh, you threaten me, do you?" snarled Hite,

"Don't you know that I can keep you out of every honest job you get by just saying a few words?"

"Oh, I don't know!" said Tom, with his old, quiet manner, and without a trace of his recent agitation. "You tried that, and no less a person than Wells said he was ready to stand by me. I guess I'm all right, Hank, and the best thing for you to do is to get off the track. If you don't there's bound to be a smash-up, and it won't be me that's hurt."

"Now, see here, Tom," said Hite, adopting a conciliatory tone, "why can't you listen to reason? You can make ten times as much by going in with me as you can by sticking to this honest business. You can do that, too, but you can work the other all right."

"There's no use talking to me, Hite, and I have no time to waste, so get out of the way and don't bother me. I won't go into your schemes, and you can't make me. You couldn't make me do it before and you can't now, and as for your threats to bring up old affairs and ruin me out here, you can't do it, and I don't care that for you!" and Tom snapped his fingers.

"I'll make you care for me!" hissed the man, attempting to seize the boy to drag him into the old building.

Tom quickly threw him off, sent him whirling into the doorway, and passed on, reaching the main street in a few moments. An ill-conditioned boy of sixteen or seventeen years appeared from somewhere as Hite reeled into the passage, and the man hurried to the door and said:

"Do you see that boy going out the alley? Follow him and get him back here. Now, be off with you."

"All right, old sport," said the boy, and then he was off and reached the end of the alley only a short distance behind Tom.

In a few minutes, the boy still following, though Tom did not know it, the young engineer stopped in front of a moderately large building and was looking up at it when Mr. Blauvelt came out, saw him, and said:

"Aha, Tom, taking a walk? I'm glad I met you. You're to take out an afternoon train to Goring. You'll come back early in the morning. The engineer who had it has asked to be transferred, and there was no one else."

"Then I'll have to live at Goring, as I shall be there at night always?"

"Yes. You don't mind that?"

"No. I'm satisfied to live anywhere, so long as I keep my job, but what about Dick and Babb? I'd like them both to be with me if I could. Dick wants to be a fireman."

"Well, I guess you can have Dick all right, but I'm not as sure about Babb."

"Dick's waiting for me now. What shall I tell him? By the way, when does my train go out?"

"At three o'clock."

"Then there's time enough to tell Dick. I'll go back to the station soon. I was just running about a bit, that's all."

"Take your time, there's no hurry, Tom. I'll see you again, but just now I have other business."

"I'm obliged to you for looking out for me, sir," said Tom. "How about Old Hundred? May I take her?"

"Why, yes, if you wish," laughed Mr. Blauvelt, "if you think she's equal to the run. I have my

doubts myself, but you seem to do so well with the old tub that perhaps she'll astonish us all. There'll be a laugh along the line, though, when they see her."

"Oh, I don't know," said Tom, blushing. "I guess she'll do nothing to be laughed at. Leave her to me this trip, and if she doesn't do well, I won't ask to take her out again."

After leaving Mr. Blauvelt, Tom walked on till there did not seem much more of interest to be seen, and then retraced his steps, not paying particular attention to a boy who ran away as he turned. Just as he reached the head of the alley where he had met Hite, a boy suddenly shot out and said:

"Say, do you know where there's a doctor? A boy's been hurt down at the station, a red-headed boy named Dick, and he's been askin' for Tom, the engineer."

"Dick hurt?" muttered Tom. "How did it happen. Where is he?"

"He got scalded; he's down to the depot, and I gotter go fur a doctor, quick."

"Find one as quickly as you can," said Tom, and he dashed into the alley, but as quick as he was his informant was quicker and ran in ahead of him.

He suddenly uttered a peculiar whistle, neither very loud nor shrill, but heard to a considerable distance. Tom heard it, but his mind was so occupied with Dick's danger that he paid little heed to it, and hurried on, suddenly colliding with the boy, who had stopped short with his body bent nearly double, and falling over him. Before he could arise two men sprang out of a doorway a few feet ahead of him and were joined by the boy, the three seizing him and bundling him inside, throwing him upon the floor of a small, dimly lighted room, which had evidently once been used for an office, as there was an old-fashioned high desk and a stove in one corner and a wooden railing with a gate in it dividing it.

"Well, you came back, I see," said one of the men, whom Tom at once recognized as Hite. "I thought you would. Now, I've got you here you ain't going to get away in a hurry."

"Oh, I don't know," said Tom carelessly, slowly getting up. "I don't think there's anything to keep me. Stand aside, you scoundrels," with a sudden change of manner, "or I'll blow the roofs of your heads off!"

CHAPTER XI.—What Further Happened in the Old Factory.

Now they suddenly found a revolver leveled at their heads in the hands of a cool, brave boy, who knew how to use it, and would not hesitate to do so at the slightest provocation. Hite and the other man fell back toward the door, evidently none too anxious to risk being shot, and Tom quickly advanced, keeping his eye on the two ruffians. The boy who had told him of Dick was the only one of the three who had his wits about him. He suddenly threw himself forward with a yell meant to disconcert Tom, dove right between the boy's legs and sent him reeling against and over the railing dividing the room in half. Tom's pistol was discharged, the bullet striking the ceiling and narrowly missing Hite's head as it

whizzed past. The weapon fell from the boy's grasp, and in an instant the two men had leaped forward and seized him, the evil-looking boy securing the revolver.

Hite and his companions held Tom securely while the boy addressed as Kid hurriedly left the room, returning in a short time with ten feet or more of fine, tarred rope.

While Hite and the other man held Tom, Kid, under Hite's directions, was rapidly securing him to the railing with the tarred rope, making the knots hard and solid, throwing all his strength into the effort.

"You may as well tell right out what the business is, Hank Hite," said Tom. "You want me to make presses and dies and other machinery, small and compact, to carry on a counterfeiting business. You know I can do fine and delicate work like this, and you got me to make a model once, not knowing what it was to be used for, and then tried to drag my name into your swindling business."

"That's what it is, Ned," laughed Hite, taking the rope out of the boy's hands and proceeding with the work. "He's a wonder, the boy is, and he'll make our fortune and his own, if he isn't too pig-headed."

"Maybe we can starve him into it, or take some other way," said Ned. "We've got ways of doin' it in this old factory. You tie him tight fust, Hank. Fix his arms and his ankles—what the deuce!"

Hite turned at the exclamation, and Tom, whose right arm was not yet bound, wrenched it free from Ned's grasp and struck the man a stunning blow under the jaw which sent him to the floor in a heap.

"Ha! We thought something was going on," said a newcomer, and Tom recognized him as Pete Budd, the voice aiding him, as the man's face was in shadow.

Two men had entered, the second being Dobbs, upon whose face the light from a little window near the ceiling now plainly shone.

"We heard a gun," said Dobbs, "and thought as how suthin' intrustin' was goin' on, but we didn't 'spect we was goin' to meet our old friend Hank."

"No, we didn't," laughed Budd. "What you doin' here, Ned? Don't ye know ye didn't orter have nothin' ter do with Hank Hite? He'll skin ye, sure as shootin', he will."

"Take my oath I didn't know it, Pete," said the other. "He's got a grudge ag'in the boy injineer, an' said there was money into it, an' ast me to help him."

Hite had now staggered to his feet and, leaning against the railing, glared at Budd and said:

"What are you doing here? Have you gone back on me, Ned?"

"Ho! you've got the boy here, have yer?" growled Budd. "We'll take him along o' us. We want him more'n you do. Cut him loose, Jim."

"You won't do nothing of the sort," said Hite. "The boy belongs to me."

"Get out o' the way," said Dobbs, pushing forward. "Don't you do nothin', Ned. H'm! Tied him pretty tight, didn't you?"

Budd seized Hite and held him while Dobbs cut the rope that bound Tom, Ned neither helping nor hindering at the work.

"We'll settle with you when we get the boy out

of the way," said Budd. "We've got a claim ag'in him, the pert young meddler."

The boy, Kid, who had disappeared at the entrance of Budd and Dobbs, now suddenly ran in and said, in a hoarse whisper:

"You better git out o' here while you kin. There's three or four fellers outside looking for the boy injineer, and they mean business."

"This way, Jim," hissed Budd, pushing open the gate and hurrying Tom toward the high desk.

Dobbs followed, saying to Ned:

"Keep that feller still, Ned. You can come if you like."

"This way," suddenly cried Hite, in a loud tone. "This way! Help! Help!"

Then Hite sprang toward the outer door, but Ned seized him and threw him down. At the same moment loud cries and the hurried tramp of feet were heard outside. Simultaneously with this Budd moved the desk out from the wall, disclosing a small door, which he quickly slid to one side and pushed Tom through, following instantly. Dobbs and Ned hurried after him, and as the door slid into place with a sharp click, Babo the conductor, and two or three brakemen rushed into the room.

"Where's Tom?" cried Babb. "You here, you cowardly skunk! Then I know you mean no good to him. Where is he, I say?"

"Pete Budd and Jim Dobbs can tell you better than I can," snarled Hite. "Go ask them."

"Through that door," said Kid. "That's where they've gone."

Babb and the others hurried to the desk, which was still pushed out from the wall, and tried the little door.

"You skip," whispered Kid. "I'll keep 'em, and I'll show ye where the boy has went. I know this place."

"The door slides!" cried Babb. "Here, give me that stool. Mebby we can smash it."

"I'll get ye a crowbar, mister," said the boy. "You just wait."

Babb seized the stool and broke it against the door without forcing the latter.

"You can't do it that way," said the boy. "You wait. I'll git suthin' better'n that."

"Look out!" cried Babb suddenly. "Dont let that cowardly cuss get away. Why, he's gone!"

Hite had decamped, but the boy hurried to the desk as Babb was coming forward, and said:

"Pull open that drawer an' you'll find an iron wrench or something, or mebby a key. They used to be in there."

One of the men opened the drawer and found a heavy iron wrench over a foot in length.

"Hello! how do you come to know so much?" asked Babb.

"Used ter work here."

"Smash her open, Bill. Oh, you did, hey? What's your name?"

"Kid Raggs. That's what they always calls me."

"How did the engineer get in here?"

"'Tother feller ast him in; said he'd got suthin' to tell him. Guess he's kinder crooked, Tom is."

"You lie, you little villain, and I believe you're keeping back something," cried Babb, seizing the boy by the shoulders and shaking him. "Tell me what it is, or I'll shake your ugly little head off!"

The brakeman had been raining blows on the

little door, and now, pulling away several large splinters, exclaimed, in astonishment:

"There's nothing here! Nothing but a bare brick wall!"

"Sakes alive, you don't say so!" cried Babb, turning to look, and then in an instant the boy had wriggled out of his grasp and made a headlong dive for the outer door.

CHAPTER XII.—In Search of Tom.

It was as the brakeman had said, and nothing but a bare brick wall was to be seen on the other side of the broken door.

"That little liar got us to waste our time here so's those scoundrels could have more time to get away with Tom," said Babb. "I'll swear somebody was in here just afore we come."

"But how did they get away?" asked one of the brakemen. "There's no other door out."

"I know there isn't; not here, anyhow, but mebby there is in the hall. Let's go out and see. I know Tom is here, 'cause I saw him go into the alley, and he never came out, and this old factory is a regular nest of cutthroats. I've knowed it as sech for a long time, and when I see Budd and Dobbs go in, I reckoned they was after Tom."

The three hurried from the little office, but although they found three or four doors in the long, narrow, dark hallway outside, none of them were open and all seemed to have been closed for years, some of them being nailed up, in fact.

"Some of those doors opens and them skunks has taken Tom through 'em," said Babb excitedly. "If anything happens to that boy, somebody'll catch it. He's the squarest feller I ever seen, and I'll make it hot fur somebody if he's hurt. I know I'm a cross-grained old crab, but I got to likin' Tom Hall fust-rate, and I'll get him out o' trouble if I die fur it."

"What are you going to do, Mr. Babb?" asked one of the men.

"Go for the police and pull down the old rookery if it comes to that to find him. Come on, we'll soon get at him, if he's here, and if he ain't, we'll find out where he is."

In the alley Babb told two of the men to wait while he and the other went to the station, and then, as they reached the main street, they suddenly met Dick, who was talking animatedly to an evil-looking boy of about seventeen.

"What do you mean, you little liar?" demanded Dick. "You can't be believed under oath. What are you giving me, anyhow? Is this a fake or what?"

"It's a straight thing I'm tellin' you, young feller," said the other. "He's in a hole, an' I'll tell you how to get him out if you gimme suthin' for it."

"I'll give you something, you ugly little liar!" said Dick. "I know you, and I don't know any good of you. You're a thief and a blackguard, and no decent man would have you around. I don't believe a word you say. You only want to get money out of me."

"I tell yer I ain't tellin' you no lie, Dick, and—cripps! I didn't see them fellers," and Kid Raggs started to run, when Babb suddenly seized him.

"It's all right, Dick," the conductor said. "Tom's in trouble. This young scamp knows

something about it. Here, you young villain, where did those scoundrels take Tom?"

Babb shook the boy roughly, and he said, with a whine:

"They went through the door back o' the desk; there's where they went just afore you come in. If you'll gimme somethin' I'll show you where they went."

"There's nothing on the other side of the door; nothing but a brick wall. They got out another way."

"No, they didn't. Stop a-shakin' of me. Wat'll yer gimme to tell yer suthin'?"

"I won't give you nothin', and I'll land you in the lockup if you don't tell me where they went. You got that other fellow away and you're lying now."

"No, I ain't. Wisher may die if I am. Stop shakin' the gizzards out'n me, an' I'll tell yer. They went out'n the door a-hind the desk, I tell yer."

"There's nothing there but a brick wall."

"Yes, they is. That wall's on'y a blind. Yer kin move it if ye know how. After that there's a way to get into the old fact'ry."

"Move a brick wall?" gasped Babb. "Now I know you're lying," and he gave Kid Raggs another shaking.

"Maybe he ain't, Mr. Babb," said Dick, "and we're losing time. It won't do no harm to look and see."

They went back to the old factory, and entered the little office, and then Babb, pointing to the wall, which was plainly visible through the broken door, said:

"There it is, Dick. You can see it for yourself. That door is only a blind. It may have been used once, but it ain't now."

"I'll show you how to open it," said Kid. "You just lemme get over there."

"Watch him, Babb," said Dick, as the conductor released his hold on the boy.

The latter dashed right over the railing, and as he reached the door there was a sharp click and it slid out of sight. Dick sprang forward and seized the boy by the collar as he stooped down quite to the floor, and in another moment something remarkable occurred. The wall, evidently solid, slid to one side and disclosed a narrow passage of uncertain extent, the end being lost in the darkness. They entered the passage and followed it for a short distance, when suddenly Dick exclaimed:

"I smell smoke. Can it be possible that——"

His question was not finished, for at the next instant a bright light suddenly flashed before them, and the end of the passage was seen to be one mass of flame.

CHAPTER XIII.—How Babb Repaid Tom.

When Budd and Dobbs hurried Tom through the little doorway behind the old desk, they paused briefly to close the door, and then, while Budd pushed the boy engineer ahead of him, Dobbs stopped for an instant, and the sound of some heavy body moving on hinges was heard.

"They'll never think of there bein' anythin' on t'other side o' that," laughed Dobbs as he speedily joined Budd.

Then the two seized Tom and hastened along a

narrow passage in almost total darkness, till they reached a flimsy door, which they pushed open, coming into a long, narrow, low-ceiled room, where there were a few dilapidated old machines of the same sort, and a lot of useless lumber and no end of rubbish, dirty cotton waste, old working-clothes, tools, papers and the like.

"Wait here a minute," said Budd, "till we c'n think a bit. The old factory's as good a place as any to keep him in, just now, and this here room is the best of all."

"Better tie him up somewheres," added Dobbs, "an' put somethin' in his mouth ter keep his jaw from goin'. He'll want ter holler, more'n likely, an' try ter fetch his friends down onto us."

Dobbs took the loose rope hanging from Tom's ankle and secured his legs to the iron uprights of one of the old machines, while Budd, producing a pipe, began to fill it.

"Get another one, Jim," he said, "and get something to close his mouth with. Well, young feller, I had a close call with you once, the time I fell out'n the injine an' got ketched by the slack o' the breeches on that there tree—on'y fur that I'd 've went plumb down to the bottom of the gulley an' got all smashed ter bits."

"Oh, I don't know!" said Tom. "A man born to be hanged is safe enough from other deaths."

"Got suthin' to close this 'ere cub's mouth with yet, Jim?" growled Budd, scratching a match on his boot and proceeding to light his pipe. "He's got—too thunderin' much—to say—durn him!" passing slightly between puffs.

"I got a old leather belt," said Dobbs, who had been prowling about the place and now returned.

"Tie his hands with it an' close his jaw," said Budd, throwing down the match and sitting on an old high school. "Fellers what talks so much has gotter be shut up."

"What's he been sayin'?" asked Dobbs, tying Tom's hands behind his back.

"He's too thunderin' cheeky, that's what he is!" growled Budd. "Close his trap for him. We'll keep him here a spell, till we settle on what we'll do with him. Mebby some of the boys what hangs out here'll know a way o' settlin' him."

"Mebby they will," muttered Dobbs, putting a gag in Tom's mouth and securing it, "but I reckon the best way'll be ter fill him full o' lead for what he done to us on the branch."

"Can't do it here," returned Budd, puffing at his pipe and sending out clouds of thick blue smoke. "That's too noisy. Better leave him to starve, I reckon."

"That's too slow," said Dobbs, with a cough. "Gee whizz! that's a 'nation strong pipe o' yourn, Pete. 'Pears ter me yer got cotton an' every other blamed thing in it."

"No, I hain't, it's nothin' but good baccy what I got—great grizzlies, Jim, the hull place is on fire!"

"It's the rubbish. Yer must ha' chucked the match in it. Good land, we gotter git!"

Jim Dobbs was right, for Budd, by his carelessness, had set fire to a pile of rubbish of the most inflammable nature, and the flames were now spreading with the greatest rapidity. Oil waste, loose papers, greasy rags that had lain closely packed till they were almost ready to burst into flames from their own heat, and other rubbish composed the pile, the door itself being saturated with oil and needing only a match to set it ablaze

in a moment. Budd had not purposely set the heap alight, but now that he realized how rapidly the flames would spread, and that the total destruction of the tumble-down old factory must follow, he accepted the situation with a hoarse laugh and said:

"He's fixed, all right, and he won't never trouble us no more. The fire's bound to travel right to the old machine, an' that settles him."

"Yes, but how in blazes are we goin' ter get out if we can't reach the office?" asked Dobbs, as the two paused at a low window at the extreme end of the long room. "Hark! Ha! ye're right. Somebody is comin'. Guess they must ha' found out about that false wall biz."

"You follow me," said Budd, and suddenly hurling himself forward, with his face covered by his arms, he dashed through the sash and disappeared.

Dobbs quickly followed, and then the two miscreants, finding themselves in the alley at its narrowest part, made all haste to escape. The broken window gave passage to the outer air, and the flames, already beginning to snap and crack and send out clouds of thick, black, choking smoke, now burst into new life. Tom felt them about his feet, felt his flesh grow hot and blistered, and struggled to escape. The effort severed the cord about his ankles, the flames having already attacked it, but his arms were still tied, and he could not cry for help, even if there were anyone to hear him. His feet were free, however, and he began rapidly scattering the burning rubbish that lay around him, and thus put off his own peril for a time. The place was doomed, he knew, and unless help arrived he would ultimately perish.

He struggled to free his arms, but the tarred rope held firm, and he could not get them loose from it. The floor was on fire all around him, the flames rapidly eating their way toward him, and he felt that his case was well-nigh hopeless, when he heard a shout and saw a tall, gaunt form suddenly appear from behind a wall of smoke and flame and dash toward him. In another moment Babb was at his side, the cords that held him were cut and the old conductor, whom men called sour and crabbed and cross-grained, had seized him in his arms, hurried him to the window and was weeping like a child.

CHAPTER XIV.—A Shot From Ambush.

Babb had saved the boy's life, for at the very next instant after he had borne Tom away from the machine the latter had fallen through the floor, the boards under it having been eaten away by the flames, unknown to all. It was Babb who had dashed through the flames, insisting that Tom was in danger, and it was he who had borne Tom to a place of safety just before the old factory was all in flames, warning the others to fly at the same time. It was Babb who had revived him, for he had fainted after the tremendous strain put upon him, and it was Babb who told Mr. Blauvelt that the boy would be ready to take out the train at the appointed time. Dick was quick with his aid, but Babb had been the first to act, and to him the boy engineer owed his life. Dick told him what had happened, after he had rested

and was ready to go to the yard, and when the young engineer knew that a conductor was wanted, he spoke for Babb. The latter appeared shortly before train time, and Tom said:

"I want to thank you, Mr. Babb, and to say that I'm glad that you and me and Old Hundred, yes, and Dick, too, are going to stick together for a while yet."

"Don't say nuthin' about it, Tom," said Babb huskily. "You trusted me and I was able to show you that I was worth it, and that's all there is to it. All aboard!" and the man hustled about and was very officious with the passengers, in order to hide his emotion.

It was a new run for Tom, and after passing Mountainville all would be strange to him, and he must get acquainted with the road, learn the grades and the curves, and find out when and where to put his engine at her best, and where he could ease up on her. Tom made the run according to scheduled time and found the road not so generally rough as on the branch, although there was one point where it was much worse than anywhere on the shorter line. At many places along the line there was considerable surprise when the old engine in charge of a boy rolled in, and many prophecies were made that it would not make the run; that it would blow up or leave the track, and that it would never climb the mountains ten miles south of Goring. Tom got to Goring without mishap, however, and said to Dick:

"Well, old chap, we're here and we have not blown up or left the track or been stalled, and we're here just when the time-table says we should be, and now, as we won't leave till morning and will have to live here, suppose we look for a place."

"You've got here because you're sure and steady," answered Dick, "but I'll bet that if a lot of these gillies tried to do it with Old Hundred they wouldn't have come in on time."

"That's not her fault," said Tom. "She'll do right if you let her."

"You know a lot about machinery, don't you?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"I'll bet you're a first-class engineer and machinist; I'll bet you could put any kind of a machine together, if you were asked."

"Do you?"

"Yes, I do. Say, what was the trouble with that road East, the one with the long name? Crooked Valley, wasn't it?"

"It had something to do with machinery, Dick, but I don't like to talk or even think about it. I was not willingly guilty of any wrong in the matter, but I had a hard time to get along after the matter came out, and so I left there and came here. It was easier to do that than to face down the lies against one. Some day I will go back and clear things up, but not now."

"And that man you nearly run over was in it?"

"Yes."

"Well, I ain't asking you any questions, Tom, but I'll stick to you just the same, 'cause you're all right."

"Thanks, Dick," and no more was said.

One afternoon as Tom reached Mountainville on his way to Goring, he saw Vira Wells and her father and Mr. Stalker come out of the station as if about to take the train. Turning to catch Babb's signal, he saw that Vira and the two men were just getting on board, and in another mo-

ment Babb signaled and he started, muttering to himself:

"I wonder what takes Vira up the road? More business, I suppose. Well, I hope that nothing happens, but something seems to every time she goes on my train."

That his forebodings were not groundless, however, was proven when, about a mile or two out from Mountainville, as he passed a thick clump of bushes alongside the track, a bullet suddenly whizzed through the little window of the cab, struck him in the right shoulder and caused him to fall from his seat and to the floor, unconscious. Dick saw him fall and sprang to his side, but as he did so he saw, not two hundred feet distant, a rail torn from the track and thrown partly down the steep bank at one side.

CHAPTER XV.—Dick's Brave Fight.

Dick realized the danger to the train in an instant, and knew that not a moment was to be wasted. He had seen Tom check and start the train many times, and he knew what was to be done, but the question was if there was time left in which to avoid the peril that threatened. The distance to be covered was alarmingly short and the train was going at a good rate of speed, and might not be stopped until too late. It might be, even now, that what he did was not done soon enough, but he flew past Tom, seized the throttle and jammed it in to the utmost; reversed and whistled sharp and shrill for brakes. Now it was to be seen whether the brakemen would respond readily or the brakes would bite, if the shutting off of the steam would check the forward movement of the train soon enough.

"Don't kill us all, Old Hundred," he murmured. "Stop in time to save us, old girl, for Tom's sake. You wouldn't send him to his death after all the kindness he has shown you, would you?"

It seemed as if the engine must have heard him, that there was something almost human in the wonderful combination of steel and iron and brass, for, suddenly, with a shake and a snort and a thrill that seemed to pass completely through it, the old engine came to a standstill.

Then he turned, intending to look to Tom again and to call to the brakemen or to Babb, when as he drew himself in he saw three men leap in from the other side and seize Tom, to drag him from the cab.

"Here what are you about, Hank Hite?" he shouted, recognizing in one of the men Tom's old enemy. "Hello! Help here! Help!"

The men had already lifted Tom from the floor and had carried him a short distance from where he had fallen, when something dropped from his shirt to the iron floor. Dick knew what it was in an instant, saw what it was before the others realized that anything had fallen. It was Tom's pistol, and in a moment Dick leaped forward, seized it, leveled it at Hite and cried:

"Drop him, you scoundrel, or I'll drop you!"

One of the men quickly threw Tom's unconscious form into such a position that Dick could not shoot without hitting it, and at the same moment Hite dropped out of the cab.

"Stop that fellow that's got Tom!" screamed

the boy, firing at Hite and sending his last bullet through the scoundrel's hat.

Then Dick saw one of the car windows slide up and saw a hand and an arm appear, saw the gleam of a pistol in the sunlight, and heard a quick, sharp report. It was Vira Wells who had fired the shot.

"Good! Hooray, bully!" cried Dick, for the girl's shot had taken the man who was making off with Tom in the leg and had brought him to the ground. Babb and six or eight men sprang forward, expecting to rescue Tom, but in an instant Hite had seized the unconscious boy, thrown him across his shoulder and hurried toward the bushes opposite the sloping edge of the bank. From the bushes at the same time appeared a dozen men armed with rifles.

"Stop where you are!" one of these shouted, "or we'll riddle every man of you!"

CHAPTER XVI.—The Brush With the Outlaws.

At the sudden appearance of the dozen armed men from the line of bushes, the men from the train hesitated, for few of them were armed. It was then that Dick came to the aid of his friends.

"Get back, all hands!" he shouted. "Make a break for it, everybody. I'll fix these fellows."

Turning his head quickly to see if his friends had all returned, Dick opened the throttle and the brave old engine quickly responded, moving backward at a good speed, the lever being reversed. The outlaws raised an angry shout, and began to make a dash for the train, firing as they ran. The passengers and brakemen all got on board safely, although a few stragglers were obliged to make flying leaps as the train moved quickly away. One or two of the outlaws succeeded in getting a foothold on the car steps, but not for long, as they were hurled unceremoniously from their places, and went rolling over the ground, receiving many bruises.

"Great snakes! I've got to stop her or she'll be running backward right into town, and go smashing things generally. Go slow, old girl," and then the boy threw in the throttle and in a few moments the train came to a halt with a jar and a rattle. Babb came hurrying forward, greatly excited, and Dick said:

"I say, I don't know what to do. I ain't an engineer. I got you away from them fellows, but we ought to go back and get Tom loose, I expect. Ain't there anybody what can run the old thing? That track's got to be mended, and we've got to knock spots out of them robbers and get Tom back."

"Run her back slow, Dick," said Babb. "I guess you can do that. Yes, we've got to get tools and rails and a crowd with guns to drive off the robbers and get Tom away from them. Go slow, and you'll be all right. Then we'll get another engineer if you don't think you can manage her."

The citizens of Mountainville were greatly surprised to see the train return so soon after it had left town, and many said that it was the fault of the engine, that they knew an old tub like that could not be trusted, that the superintendent had no business to put a boy on the train, anyhow, and much more to the same purport. They were greatly astonished when they learned

the real reason for the return of the train, and were eager to go on and rout the robbers who had attempted to hold it up and had carried Tom off. Mr. Blauvelt was sent for, and he directed Rugg to find an engineer at once, and to send not only a large force of workmen, but to arm them and to secure as many volunteers as possible to go against the outlaws and rescue the boy engineer. When he heard what Dick had done, he praised the boy highly, and said:

"Well, Richard, I always thought you were rather wild and high-flying, but being with Tom has evidently made you as sure and steady as he is. Keep on and you'll be a fine fellow one of these days."

The train set out again in half an hour, but, as no engineer could be found who was willing to run the old engine, Dick stayed in the cab with a brakeman to help him, and the return was made to the point where the loose rail had halted them. The men set to work at once, and Dick, getting down from the engine, saw Vira Wells approaching.

"You were very brave, Dick," she said.

"So were you, Miss Vira. I was only sorry I had no more cartridges, for I would have liked to have plugged them skunks like you did."

"I'll give you some," she said, taking a handful of cartridges from the side pocket of her jacket.

"Thanks," said Dick, producing Tom's pistol and trying the cartridges in it. "These are all right; just a fit. Say, do you always carry a gun?"

"No, only when I think I need it."

"Well, you did this time, anyhow. My, but you're a shot! Tom ain't any better. I wish I knew where he was."

"Suppose we try and find him."

CHAPTER XVII.—What Dick Heard.

The boy looked at the speaker for a moment, and then said:

"I'm willing enough, but do you suppose we can?"

"Well, we can try, at any rate. If we only find traces of him, that will be something."

"Come on," said Dick. "Do you know I like your spunk. It's no wonder Tom thinks a lot of you."

"How do you know he does?" asked Vira, blushing.

"Well" stammered Dick, "he said we was to be extra careful when he knew you was on the train. Say, here's about where they went into the bushes. Wonder what there is behind 'em? Rocks, I guess. This is one of the rockiest countries in the world, I guess. Mebbly there's caves, though I never heard of any around here. There's always caves in the mountains, though, ain't there?"

"Quite often, at any rate," answered Vira, "but I never heard of any just in this part."

"Nor me neither," said Dick, parting the bushes, "but there might be one, and it'll be as well to keep a lookout for it."

There was no one in sight, nor any sounds, except those made by the men at work, and Dick

felt just a little nervous as he pushed on and found everything still and no signs of life, except here and there a broken twig or a patch of tangled grass.

"I don't believe that feller Hite had anything to do with the others," he said, "but what bothers me is, who fired that shot that took Tom in the shoulder and tumbled him off his seat? The feller who did it must have known nothing about the rails being loosened and thrown down. That was done so we'd stop, and the other fellers could go through the train."

"But they did not come out as soon as we stopped."

"No, and mebbly all they wanted was to get Tom. Hite said they was no Pete Budd and his gang around, but these fellers didn't seem to meddle with him as the other ones did."

They were passing a bit of ledge which cropped out of the ground to the height of a few feet, the base being skirted by a thick coarse undergrowth, when all at once Dick heard some one say, as if at his very feet:

"It's no use of your kicking, for I've got you now, and you must do the work. You've done it before."

Dick stood rooted to the spot, one hand thrown behind him by way of caution, the other grasping his revolver. Vira was close behind him, and stood still as he did, for it was evident that she had heard the voice and was as greatly surprised as he was himself.

"You know why I did the work," came an answering voice, and Dick had great difficulty in keeping back an exclamation of astonishment, for he recognized it instantly as Tom's.

"You did it to make money out of the road, of course, and you did. How much Crooked River stock did you get rid of before some one squealed?"

"You lie, Hank Hite," answered Tom, but Dick was utterly at a loss to know where the voice of his friend proceeded from.

It seemed to come from the ground, and yet the boy knew that this was not likely, as all was clear where he stood. Thoroughly excited, he lowered himself gradually till his hands touched the coarse, dry soil and the scattered stones, and then he observed a fissure an inch or two in depth and two feet in length, just in front of his feet. He inserted one hand carefully in this crack and found that he could reach down nearly to the end of his fingers before touching anything. Then he kneeled still lower, put his face close to the fissure, and heard, more distinctly than before, Hite's answer:

"I do, hey? Well, it'll be hard to prove it. Come now, if you'll make the machines we can work the same scheme here. The B. & G. stock is well listed, and any one'll buy it. You know the signatures, and can tell us if we get 'em right. There's a lot of money in it, and we've got just the right sort of men to push the thing, if you'll only help us. Good machinists like you, that understand fine work like this, are hard to get."

"I tell you I will not," said Tom, decidedly.

"But you did it once, and there's your old reputation. You can't go back East, and these fools here trust you and think you're honest, and there's the best chance in the world for you."

"You can talk till you're blind, Hank Hite,"

Dick heard Tom say, "but you won't change my determination. You can torture me, kill me even, and you won't do it."

"We'll find a way to make you!" hissed Hite. "No one but us knows this place; there's no treacherous Budd or Dobbs to go back on us; it's no tumbledown old factory with sliding brick walls, and all that, and you can't get out, nor your friends can't find you."

"Can't they?" thought Dick, and at that moment the shrill whistle of Old Hundred was heard, repeated four or five times.

"What's that?" cried Hite.

"Old Hundred's whistle. The boys are somewhere about, and you may be sure they'll be looking for me. You can trust to Dick to do so, anyhow."

"You bet you can!" said Dick, and, if the shrill, clear whistle of the engine had not sounded again at that very instant, the boy's excited exclamation would surely have been heard.

He crept carefully away from the crack, and then, arising, said in a low tone:

"They're calling us, and we ought to go back. We can't do anything alone. We'll get the boys and come back, and then we'll have Tom out of that hole, wherever it is, in less than no time."

They hurried back to the railroad, where they found that the track had been mended and the train was ready to proceed.

"There isn't a sign of the outlaws," said Babb, "only their tracks as they went away. The boys have hunted and they can't find no trace of Tom around here, or of the men, neither. The only thing to do is for us to go on and the boys to follow up the trail of the robbers."

"I've got a better plan than that," said Dick. "I know where Tom is, or I think I do, for I've heard him talking," and in a few words the boy told what he and Vira had learned.

CHAPTER XVIII.—What Dick Found.

After Tom had fallen from his seat in the cab, striking his head as he fell, he did not regain full consciousness for some time, although he was dimly aware of being carried somewhere, and of going down a flight of rough steps, and of hearing men talking about him. When he came more fully to his senses he found himself reclining on a rude couch or bed, or perhaps a rock over which a blanket had been thrown, a dull pain in his shoulder, and his right arm feeling numb and lifeless.

He gradually became aware that he was in a small, rather high cave, which was partly lighted from natural fissures in the roof and partly from a torch stuck in a crevice. There was little or no smoke from the torch, and there seemed to be a sufficient quantity of pure air in the cave, but it was some time before the boy located the entrance to the place.

There were four or five men sitting around on kegs or on the rocks, the floor being most uneven, and at last another man entered, and Tom saw that he came down a flight of very steep stone steps, some of which were natural while others had been put in place to make the descent easier. By the light of which entered

through a crack in the roof Tom estimated that the cave must be at least thirty feet in height, but none of its other dimensions were anything nearly as great, the extreme length being less than twenty feet.

It was possible* that there might be other chambers, natural or excavated, leading from this, but that question did not concern him as much as to know how he had come there and who were his captors. The men said little, and at length went away, all except one, who presently drew a keg within a few feet of where he lay, sat on it, and said:

"Well, Master Tom, how do you feel?"

"None the better for being in your company, Hank Hite. What place is this? Have I been wounded? Was there a fight? Ouch! It's in my shoulder. Who got the drop on me? I was shot from behind, wasn't I?"

"I guess you was, but that don't matter. One of the boys fixed you up. You'll get the use of your arm again shortly. What does concern us is that we've got you, and we're going to make use of you."

"Where is this cave? Do you live here? Whom do you mean by 'we'? Have you got confederates? What's your scheme, the old one?"

"The cave is in the mountains, impossible to locate, and known only to a few. Your friends will never find you here. I've got you now, and you're going to do my work. You did it before, and there's no reason why you shouldn't do it now."

"You lie, Hank Hite," said Tom raising himself to a more upright position with his left arm, his right being of little use. "There is just the same reason now why I should not do it that there always was, and I won't."

"You will, if we make you," snarled Hite, and there was more talk to the same purpose, Tom defying the man and giving his opinion of the fellow's character in very plain language.

The boy noticed that above his head where the light from without entered indirectly, the cave was highest, the roof being chimney-shaped.

"This place may or may not be inaccessible," he mused, "but if any one could get on the top he would hear every word spoken in here. There's a regular speaking tube up there. Maybe Hite does not know it, but I'm used to seeing these things."

"Are there any other caves connecting with this?" asked Tom, carelessly.

"No, there—never you mind whether there is or not. No, there isn't, not that any of your friends can find, and, anyhow, they won't be looking; they'll be followin' the trail the boys made."

"How many are there of the boys, as you call them? Do you include Budd and Dobbs and those fellows?"

"No, I don't. They ain't in it. I told you that. Oh, you can't get away this time the way you done the last. Do you see this keg what I'm sitting on? Well, there's powder in it, and sooner than let your friends get you out of here, even if they did find the place, I'd blow you and me and them to everlastin' smash!"

"Oh, I don't know," said Tom. "You might threaten to do so, but I don't think you're brave enough. You think too much of your own miserable life. You'd blow me up ust for spite, fast

enough, but you'd take precious care that you were far enough away not to be hurt by the time the fuse went off."

"Well, I ain't blowing you up, 'cause I got better use for you, and they don't know how to find it, and they won't think of lookin' for you anywhere hereabouts, so you needn't bank on that."

"You don't suppose they are going to follow one trail alone, do you?" asked Tom. "You admit that there is one, and you think that's the only one they're going to follow. They'll take the trail leading away from here, will they? What about following it both ways? Do you think my friends are fools?"

"It don't go both ways," said Hite, excitedly, getting up and pacing the cavern floor angrily. "There's nothing to show a trail around the cave. They started it quite a ways from here. I tell you no one can find the way here, anyhow. You gotter lift up bushes, roll away a big stone and then take a path that looks as if it led to nothing. The other paths looks more like the right one than this does."

"You're talking very loud, Hite," said Tom, in a quiet tone. "Don't you know that there are holes in the roof? Don't you know that there's a regular chimney right over my head which will carry every sound straight up, as if through a tube? Suppose some of the boys were prowling up there? They'd hear you, as sure as preaching."

Hite started, looked up, walked nervously back and forth, muttered something, drew his pistol, and then suddenly started and cried:

"What's that?"

"Some one rolling that stone back," said Tom. "You've given the thing away, Hite."

"The deuce I have!" snarled Hite. "It's some of the boys coming back. If it ain't, it's nothing but—good land!"

"Here he is!" cried a ringing voice. "Hooray, we've found him. Hi! drop that gun, Hank Hite, or you're a dead man!"

CHAPTER XIX.— Out of the Cave.

At Dick's stern command to Hite to drop his revolver, the man started, hesitated for a moment and then aimed at the keg upon which he had been sitting. Tom saw the movement, and, having sprung up at the first sound of Dick's voice, now threw himself forward and against Hite with great violence. The man's weapon was discharged, but the bullet struck the ground. Then Dick and Babb ran in upon him and disarmed him, the man struggling violently to escape.

"You can't do anything to me," said Hite, doggedly. "You can't prove anything."

"We can prove that you ran away with Tom," said Dick.

"That was to save his life. If I hadn't done it, those fellows would have killed him. They're down on him."

"You're a first-class liar, Hite," said Dick, "but you can't fool me. I heard you bragging to Tom that you had got him, and meant to keep him. Ain't that abduction? Now, you ran

off with him once before in Bulletville, and we can hold you for that."

"Come on; get him out of this," said Babb. "The train's a-waitin', and there's somebody outside that's awful anxious about Tom."

"If you're taking me up, you'll have to arrest the boy," snarled Hite. "He's a thief and a forger, and he's wanted in the East for swindling a railroad."

"We've heard that lie before, Hite, and we don't believe it," said Dick. "Come, get a move on you. Look out for him, boys. Any more fellows here, Tom?"

"Not that I know of. There may be other caves, but I'm not sure."

"There ain't any," snarled Hite, as the men pushed him forward, "and it's a mystery to me how you found this one."

"That's easy," said Dick. "We heard you talking, and you told us just how to get in."

"I told you that you talked too loud, Hank," laughed Tom. "That roof is a regular chute for sounds."

"We got onto it by accident first," said Dick, "Vira Wells and me, and then when we came back this fellow told us just how to get in. What are you going to do with him?"

"I don't know," said Tom strangely moved. "We can't let him go, and I don't know that I want him locked up."

"Why not?" asked Dick, in great astonishment.

"Oh, I don't know," said Tom, carelessly, and then he went up the steps.

"You'll have to help me with Old Hundred, Dick," he added, when he reached the outer air, "for I've got a bad arm. It's not serious, but it bothers me just now."

Tom went back to his train, and was received with shouts of welcome, and then, taking his seat on the engine, he gave Dick his directions, and the broken journey was resumed. Hite was put off at the next town, where instructions were given to the police to forward him to Mountainville, the county seat, to await a charge of attempted abduction. Tom continued his run and arrived at Goring not quite half an hour late, having made up much of his lost time on the way, and earning new fame for himself as an engineer, and for Old Hundred as a reliable engine. When they stopped Vira came up to the cab and said:

"You must have your arm looked after at once. Father knows an excellent surgeon in Goring, and you must go to him. Here is the address," handing Tom a card.

"Thank you, I will see him."

"I should hate to have anything serious happen to you," continued the girl. "You are so brave and so good an engineer."

"You are brave yourself," answered Tom. "Dick told me how well you behaved, and I cannot thank you too much, knowing that it was in my behalf."

"Dick did it all," interrupted Vira, hastily. "He is a brave fellow, and thinks the world of you. He is a real treasure, and would do anything for you."

"Yes, Dick is all right, but you must not underestimate what you did yourself. It is not every young girl who can handle a pistol as you do, and who will use it so bravely."

"I could not help it when you were in danger,"

said Vira, blushing, and Tom thought she looked quite as pretty now as when he had first seen her, wearing the pink sunbonnet.

Tom saw the surgeon, had his wound attended to, and by morning was so much improved that he needed very little of Dick's help, and in two or three days was able to use both arms as well as before.

CHAPTER XX.—A Clever Ruse.

Tom heard next morning that Hite had escaped from the lock-up during the night, and that although officers were on the lookout for him, he had not been retaken. It was thought that his escape had been effected by friends outside, but as he had not been generally known, this theory did not receive much attention.

It was a week after the adventure just beyond Mountainville and they had reached the very place where the shot had been fired at Tom, as they were on their afternoon run to Goring, when just as Tom stooped to see something about the engine, a bullet whizzed past where his head had been an instant before, and struck the woodwork of the window opposite.

"Hello! There it is again!" cried Dick, as they rushed on. "Are you hurt, Tom?"

"No. What the matter?"

"Didn't you hear a shot?"

"No."

"Here's the mark of the bullet; yes, and here's the bullet itself," said Dick, excitedly, picking a battered bit of lead out of the wood with his knife blade. "What sort of a bullet is it?"

"It was shot from a rifle, and is extra large. If that had ever hit me, you'd be occupying the engine alone, Dick."

Dick said no more, but the next morning as Tom was putting on his jumper and overalls, he noticed a queer-looking bundle in his locker.

"What's this, Dick?" he asked.

"That?" laughed Dick, "oh, that's a decoy."

"A decoy?"

"Yes, a dummy."

"What are you going to do with it, old man?"

"You'll see, Tom. What do you think of this? Is it any good? I don't know much about buying such things, but I can use them pretty well for a young fellow. What do you think of it?"

He handed a revolver to Tom as he spoke, and watched the other's face carefully as he examined it.

"That's all right," said Tom. "It's a good make, and seems true, but I should say it was rather a heavy caliber."

"What are you going to do with it, Dick?"

"Use it in case of necessity," said the boy in a non-committal manner.

"Don't shoot yourself with it," said Tom, handing the pistol back to Dick.

"You needn't be afraid," and Dick stuck the pistol in his hip pocket.

"And the dummy, Dick?"

"Oh, that's for target practice," laughed the other.

They were within a mile or so of the place where the two shots had been fired at Tom, when Dick came into the cab, put his mouth close to Tom's ear, and said:

"I'm going to use that dummy now, if you

don't mind, and I want you to do just as I say."

"All right, Dick. What are you going to do?"

"I want you to get up and sit under your seat. I'm going to put the dummy in your place, and try and draw the fire of those villains."

"But maybe they won't be there now."

"And maybe they will. Just you do as I say."

Tom left his place, and Dick substituted the figure he had made, propping it in such a manner that to one on the road it looked just like a man on the engineer's seat. It wore a blue jumper and a uniform cap, had its head turned to one side, and its hand of the throttle, and had such a natural look, even at a short distance away, that Tom was forced to laugh.

"Pretty good, Dick," he said. "You're a regular artist. I don't know if your plan will work, though."

"Down with you," said Dick, and then as Tom crouched beside his high perch, the boy screened himself just behind the little partition back of it in such a manner that he could see down the road and yet escape observation himself.

As they neared the particular clump of bushes whence the two shots had been fired, Dick saw them move perceptibly, not with the wind, but as if some one was behind them and moving forward. As they were nearly abreast of the clump Dick saw a puff of smoke come from them. On the instant the smoke was seen he threw up his weapon and fired three shots in quick succession. The figure on Tom's bench fell forward, and Dick fired another shot. Simultaneously with the falling of the figure and quickly following the sound of Dick's shot, a yell of pain was heard from the bushes, and a man was seen to leap into the air and then plunge forward.

CHAPTER XXI.—A Strange Message.

When Tom's train ran into Mountainville Rugg, the yard superintendent, Mr. Blauvelt, and Mr. Wells came up to the cab.

"How would you like to go back on the branch, Tom?" asked the general superintendent.

"Anything you like, sir," answered the boy.

"The Bad River bridge is all right again," said Rugg, "and you won't have any trouble there."

"I never did have," laughed Tom, "it was the bridge that had it."

"By the way," said Mr. Wells, "if you go on the branch, you'll have to leave the employ of the B. & G. road."

"How's that?" asked Tom, in surprise.

"Because the mining company is making a deal to buy the branch, rolling stock and everything."

"Then if I go on the branch, I'll lose my first job."

"And get a better one," said Rugg.

"You won't always be an engineer," said Wells, "or, at least, not a locomotive engineer. You'll be a railroad engineer. You've got it in you, and I think that under your direction we'll some day build the branch up to be an important road."

"Do you want me to go on the branch, Mr. Wells?"

"Yes."

"And will you let me go, Mr. Rugg?"

"Yes."

"And will you sell Old Hundred, Mr. Blauvelt?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll go. When shall it be?"

"Next week."

"All right."

The run to Bulletville was continued, the three men waving their hands to Tom, and Dick saying gleefully:

"Well, you'll lose your first job, Tom, but you're so sure and steady that you'll get along all right."

"It'll be my first job over again, Dick; for I was on the branch in the beginning, and I'm going back to it."

"I wouldn't be surprised to see you the boss of the branch some day," said Dick.

"Oh, I don't know. What makes you think that?"

"Oh, I've an idea or two in this red head of mine," laughed Dick, "and that's one of them. You just wait, my boy."

"Well, if I'm to be the boss, you will be next to me, Dick."

"Oh, I don't know," said Dick, imitating Tom's manner. "There'll be some one else next."

"Who is it?"

"A young lady in a pink——"

"Stop your nonsense," laughed Tom, blushing furiously, and Dick went about his work.

The next morning when they reached Bulletville, the disreputable boy called Kid Raggs came up to the engine, handed Tom a bit of crumpled paper. There was a note written on it in a sprawling hand, as follows:

"Tom: I am dying. If you want to see me alive once more, come to the ruins of the old factory in the alley. I am sorry I tried to do you up, and will make a confession that will clear your name.
H. H."

CHAPTER XXII.—Tom's Secret.

Tom went at once to the ruins of the old factory in the alley, the part that had been the office being in a better condition than the rest. Here the windows were broken, there was a hole in the ceiling, the old desk and railing were badly charred, and the floor was burned and the walls blackened, but there was still some sort of shelter, and, over by the desk, there was a rude bed upon which some one seemed to be lying as Tom entered.

"Is that you, Tom?" asked a voice, not feeble from lack of strength, but as if weakness was simulated.

"Yes," said the boy advancing. "What is the matter? Were you hurt at the time of your last adventure?"

"No, not then, but afterward. That villain Dobbs has done for me. Come over here, Tom, I want to speak to you."

Tom crossed the room to where Hite lay on the bed, and looked at him.

"Come closer, Tom," the man said in a much weaker and hoarser voice than before. "I want you to hear what I have to say."

Tom bent over the bed, and in an instant the man threw up his arms, seized him and dragged him down.

"I've got you now, you young cub," he hissed, as he leaped out of the bed, fully dressed.

Tom attempted to rise, when the man struck him on the head and dazed him for an instant.

"This time you're going to do as I say, you self-willed brat. I've had trouble enough with you, and I won't have any more. You'll do as I want you to, or I'll kill you. Do you understand that?"

"I understad that you are a treacherous scoundrel, as you have always been," said Tom, "and I might have known that you would have been up to some such trick as this."

"Shut the door, Kid," said Hite to the boy who came shuffling into the place. "That imp of a crony may want to follow. If he does, knock him on the head."

"You can be sure that Dick will follow," said Tom, trying to rise, but feeling dizzy. "He knows where I have come, and if I don't return he will be sure to look for me."

"He won't find you, then," laughed Hite. "Open the trap, Kid."

The boy pulled up a loose trap door near where Tom was sitting, and the young engineer saw a black hole, from which came foul smells and poisonous gases.

"Chuck him down there when I give the word, Kid," said the man. "Maybe that'll bring him to his senses."

"If you touch me, you young imp, I'll throw you down there, wherever it is. There's no use in your using threats, Hank, for they won't move me. You've tried that before."

"The mining company has bought the branch and you'll have a big stake in it, 'cause they like you. You've got a pull with old Wells, and you can work things all right. Will you do it?"

"No."

"Confound your obstinacy, don't you see that you won't be suspected, and that you can make three or four times your salary on the outside as well as have a good thing on the inside?"

"You're only wasting your breath, Hank," said Tom, pushing the man's pistol aside and trying again to rise. "I tell you I won't have anything to do with your scheme."

"Once more, will you do as I tell you?" asked Hite, coming forward.

"No."

"Then, hang you for an obstinate cur, I'll throw you down in that pest hole and let you rot."

The man seized him and began to drag him toward the hole in the floor. Hite was slowly dragging Tom toward the hole, but could not release the boy's grasp on him. Suddenly Kid uttered a startled exclamation, and then a crash was heard. In an other instant Dick rushed into the place, pistol in hand.

Hite uttered a cry like that of a wild beast, threw off Tom's grasp and dashed toward the narrow door near the desk. Dick took quick aim at the scoundrel, and was about to fire, when Tom sprang forward and threw up his arm. The bullet went through the hole in the ceiling, and the next moment Hite had escaped.

"What did you do that for, Tom?" Dick asked.

"Because I could not let you kill my father."

CHAPTER XXIII.—The Last of a Bad Man.

For a few moments Dick was absolutely speechless, his eyes fixed on Tom in wonder and his arms falling limp at his sides.

"Your father?" he gasped at last.

"Yes."

"Do you mean to tell me that that scoundrel is your father?"

"Yes, Dick."

"But he is a thief, an outlaw, everything bad."

"I know it, Dick, and I will have nothing to do with him. I have denied him for years, and yet I cannot see him shot down like a dog."

"It's what he deserves. He would have killed you. Ugh! What's in that hole. It's perfectly awful. He would have thrown you down there if I hadn't come. He's a miserable villain, and if you are his son he doesn't care a rap for you only for what he can make out of your smartness."

"Yes, I know, Dick," said Tom, "but don't stay here. I'll tell you about it."

They left the ruin, Kid having disappeared, and when they reached the outer air Tom regained his color and strength and was soon himself again. They had reached the yard, and, climbing up to his place on the old engine, Tom sat down and said:

"My name is not Tom Hall, nor is it Hite. My father's name is Henry Huntington, but he was called Hank by his cronies. He assumed the name of Hite, and generally went by it. I am glad he did not use my name, which I dropped for good reasons till I could clear it. My name is Thomas Halstead Huntington, but Tom Hall was good enough when I came out here."

"And your mother?" asked Dick, in a low tone.

"She is dead. That man made her life wretched, and she died when I was a boy of ten. I knew enough to know why she died. I would not live with the man afterward, although he tried to make me, claiming that he had a right to my services till I was of age."

"Was there no one else?"

"No. My mother was an only child, and her parents were dead. I went to school, but from the time I was twelve I earned enough to pay my own way, and then I had friends who helped me, sent me where I could develop my mechanical skill and bought me tools."

"I could make models of machinery when I was fourteen, and all my spare time was devoted to this work. Then I began to work out my own ideas, building small and delicate but practicable machines while I was still studying."

"At seventeen I left school and went into a machine shop, afterward getting on the railroad and working for a year as a fireman, although I was perfectly competent to be an engineer, but my age was in my way."

"Hite, as I prefer to call him, pretended to be my friend, and got me to build a very small and compact press, one of the most perfect things of its kind, saying that he would patent it for me and make my fortune."

"The press was used to print forged stock of the railroad company, and forty thousand dollars' worth was printed, although the road was worth less than a quarter of that sum."

"Hite and his friends attempted to dispose of their spurious stock, and succeeded in getting rid

of some of it in England, but then by a lucky accident the secret came out. Hite tried to drag my name into the thing, and covered his own crime till he could escape.

"I was exonerated, but many believed me guilty. I lost my job on the road and found it impossible to get anything else. My old friends were dead or far away; people distrusted me. I had no one to advise or help me. I was afraid that Hite would contrive to get me in his grasp, and I left home and came West.

"I worked here and there, and tramped when I could not get money to ride, and finally reached Mountainville, two thousand miles and more from my old home, and made up my mind that I would get a job as an engineer in spite of everything."

At that moment the boys heard the sound of a pistol shot in the vicinity of the station, and both looked out of the window of the cab.

"There's a crowd gathering," said Dick. "There's some sort of excitement. It might be a fight. Guess we'd better wait and find out, and not get in it ourselves."

"That's a wise plan," said Tom, "and too few adopt it at such times."

A few minutes later they started toward the station, and presently met Babb, who seemed greatly excited.

"Well, that's the last of him," he said. "He was trying to get out of town when Sharpley and a couple of constables arrested him."

"Who was trying to get away?" asked Tom.

"He made a fuss, grabbed a pistol out of Sharpley's belt and shot himself dead."

"Who did?" asked Dick.

"Why, Hank Hite, of course. I thought I told you."

"So he's dead then," said Tom. "I'm glad you didn't do it, Dick, and now, let's forget him, for he can do neither of us any more harm."

CHAPTER XXIV.—Conclusion.

Tom found the body of the dead outlaw in the freight house, and said to the sheriff's officer:

"I will take charge of him. I knew him, and will see that he has a decent funeral. It will be necessary to call in the coroner, I suppose?"

"Yes, maybe so. The man shot himself; I did not shoot him."

"So I understand. Well, notify me when the business is finished, and I will see to the disposal of the remains."

The next day there was a quiet funeral, and Hank Hite was buried in a quiet corner of a little cemetery out of town, and before long he was forgotten, no one seemed to inquire who was laid in the obscure grave marked only by a stone bearing the inscription: "H. H., aged forty years." Besides Dick, only the superintendent and Mr. Wells knew the relationship which the dead man had borne to Tom, and they kept the matter secret, Tom stipulating that Vira should be informed, and requesting Dick to keep his knowledge to himself. Pete Budd was tried and sent to jail for a long term, and the neighborhood knew no more of him. Jim Dobbs continued his career in the vicinity of Bad Man's, and attempted to hold up the first train that ran over the Branch, after the mining company took hold of it, and was promptly shot by some of the trainmen.

Tom took Old Hundred over the Branch along

with Dick and Babb, and made two trips a day for a considerable time—until he had a better position offered him, in fact. From being an engine with a bad record, No. 100 became known as the most reliable locomotive in those parts, and all because it had an engineer who understood it and his business, and could get the most out of everything that he had charge of. When he was twenty-one Tom went East for a few months, and when he returned it was known that Mr. Thomas H. Huntington had been completely exonerated of all blame in the matter of the forgeries against the Crooked Valley Railroad, and that his name was as free from stain as that of the most respected citizen in the land. Shortly after his return Tom was married to Vira Wells, and Dick was the best man. At the same time Tom gave up his position as engineer on the Branch and Dick took his place, giving general satisfaction and being as well liked as any man on the road, next to Tom. Babb gave up his place of conductor to take that of train dispatcher at Mountainville, and everybody said that it was wonderful what a nice man he had become, just the opposite of the cross, crabbed fellow he had once been.

Many years have passed since then. Tom is president of the road, and of the mining company. Dick is general superintendent. Wells and Stalker have retired, and Blauvelt is thinking of doing so. Babb and Rugg and Hogg have life pensions, and the man most respected by them, and all who know him, was once a boy engineer, and took his first job under most adverse circumstances. Last of all, in a building on Mr. Thomas H. Huntington's spacious grounds stands an old locomotive, out of date and old-fashioned, but kept always clean and bright and ready for work, although it never does any, and on the boiler-head, in shining brass, are the figures 100, and Babb, who loves to keep them bright, says:

"That's the best old gal in the business, and that's her doorplate, and when I die I want her to be fired up and toot over my grave, so's to let the folks know that old Babb's gone, but till that time I'm goin' to look out for her, for, old as she is, she's just like Tom Hall, sure and steady."

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AL, THE ATHLETE, OR, THE CHAMPION OF THE CLUB

By R. T. BENNETT

(A Serial Story)

CHAPTER XVI.—(Continued)

"The worst the tramps did was to half starve me," said Bud.

The boys had got the tramp up the ladder, and he now revived.

When he saw the fix he was in he began to swear and threaten his young captors with the most dire vengeance.

Al walked over to him and said, angrily:

"You stop using such filthy language or I'll gag you!"

"Untie me hands, an' I'll lick ther hull gang av yer!" bellowed Mike.

"We won't give you any chance at us at all. Now shut up, will you?"

"No, I won't!"

"All right. This will cork you up, I guess."

And Al gagged him.

Then they all marched out of the hut, compelling the captive to go along, and every one kept a keen lookout for Mike's friends.

Al led the way down Blue Mountain, and when they reached the rustic bridge over the creek there were the two officers, and the prisoner was turned over to them.

Surrounded by the boys, the policemen took their prisoner to the town, and Al and Bud started for the Harlow house.

The little fellow was wild with delight to get back home safe and sound, and fairly ran up on the front stoop.

Al rung the bell, and Jennie came to the door.

"Bud!" she screamed, as she caught sight of her brother. In a moment more she had him in her arms and was hugging and kissing him, while tears of joy rolled down her pretty cheeks.

In the midst of it Mr. Harlow came down the hall.

"What's the matter?" he asked. Then he saw Al and added: "Adams! Back!"

"I've brought Bud back to you, sir," said the boy, quietly.

"Good gracious!" he cried, and then he seized Bud in his arms.

The noise brought Mrs. Harlow out of the back room, and Bud rushed toward her, and a shriek of joy escaped her, and she covered his face with kisses, and she wept over him passionately.

"Guess I'll go now," said Al.

"All I can say is God bless you, Al Adams!" said the old banker, emotionally, as he shook hands with our hero. "The debt of gratitude I owe you can never be repaid—it is too great."

"Good-night, Mr. Harlow!"

"Call again soon," begged the old gentleman, earnestly.

Then the happy father ran into the parlor, where his wife had gone with Bud, and Jennie stood at the door and held out her hand to Al, saying:

"You make me think more and more of you all the time."

"Just what I want," laughed the happy boy, and, giving her a kiss, he raised his hat to her and went home.

CHAPTER XVII.

Return of the Prodigal.

On the following morning William Drew and his son read an account in the local paper of the capture of Scotty and his companions.

It also gave an explanation of how Al had saved Mr. Harlow's son from the abductors, and hinted broadly that Scotty had intimated that a certain wealthy citizen of Midwood was responsible for the crime.

The article added in conclusion that the police had strong reason to believe that the tramp would confess before the day was over who his rich employer was, and why the little boy was kidnapped.

The feeling of horror that this article inspired in the minds of the guilty father and son may well be imagined.

Driving the servant from the dining-room, the mill-owner turned a white, terror-stricken face to his son and gasped, hoarsely:

"Jim, we are lost!"

The old man was an excitable rascal, but his offspring was a cool villain, for after a moment's reflection he replied:

"Get out, pop. What are you talking about?"

"Our plan was baffled by that accursed young snoop, Al Adams!"

"To thunder with Adams! We can fix him for meddling!"

"But that won't stop Scotty from giving us away."

"No one said it would. But we can prevent the tramp from squealing."

"How?" was the eager, trembling query.

"With money, of course. Send a lawyer to fix the bribe with the tramp and spend money to get Scotty and his pals admitted to bail. Once they are out of jail, let them light out and forfeit their bonds. It's better to lose money that way than to let the skunk give us away, ain't it?"

A look of intense relief overspread the tortured face of the guilty man, and he sprang to his feet, and, clapping Jim on the back with genuine admiration, he cried, joyfully:

"Jim, you are a trump!"

"Now, keep cool and get busy. Time is precious."

"I'll attend to it right away. Do you think those busybodies are apt to find your mother's hiding place?"

"Of course not. Don't be so nervous."

"We must be careful not to let it be known that we are behind the bailing of those tramps, or the public and the police will suspect us."

"Now you are talking with sense, pop. Get ready, and I'll go with you."

Five minutes later the two rascals were in their carriage, riding away at a rapid pace in an effort to save themselves from prison.

The attorney they wished to see lived in a neighboring town, and they headed straight for the railroad depot, where they alighted.

A train pulled in just as they hurried from the ticket office, and they nearly collided with a solitary passenger who alighted.

He was a well-dressed, middle-aged man, with gray hair and a beard of the same color. His eyes were deep, gray and piercing.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said he to the mill-owner, politely. "Can you direct me to the residence of a family named Adams?"

The guilty pair glared at him in a startled manner, and the elder Drew stiffened up and said, superciliously:

"No, we can't!"

"Sorry I offended you with the question," said the gentleman, in some surprise. "You see, I am a stranger in this place, and I am very anxious to meet the family I just mentioned."

"We are not walking directories!" snapped the mill-owner. "Come on, Jim, or we will miss the train!"

And they boarded the cars and were carried away.

An amused smile crossed the stranger's face as he gazed after them, but this expression deepened into one of amazement, as he saw a wiry little man suddenly rush from behind the station and go racing after the last car of the train.

It was Detective Fox!

It was only by a most desperate sprint that he managed to catch the train, but he made a flying leap and it carried him upon the step.

He was trailing the Drews!

The stranger now turned and walked away, muttering:

"What a conceited old man!"

He made his way up Main street and saw a little boy coming toward him with some letters in his hand which he had just got from the post-office. It was Bud Harlow.

"I say, youngster," said the man, pleasantly, "can you tell me——"

But Bud had been warned to keep shy of people whom he did not know, who might speak to him in the street, as his parents feared that another attempt might be made to carry him off.

He therefore gave the stranger a quick, scared glance, and without saying a word he suddenly took to his heels, and ran for his life.

The stranger glared at him in the most profound astonishment.

"By Jove!" the man exclaimed. "That beats everything! What's the matter with the people in this place? Every one seems to shun me as if I were infected with some horrible disease."

He saw Bud disappear around the nearest corner, and then resumed his walk up the street, watching for some one else to accost.

When he reached the drug store he met Nick Marsh and Fred Abby coming down the street, and stepped in front of them.

"Do you know any one in this town named Adams?" he asked them.

The two boys had just been speaking about Al's adventure of the night before, and they instantly became suspicious of the man, for they thought he might be the hidden rascal who had come to wreck vengeance upon their friend for getting the hobo arrested.

They glanced at each other meaningly, and Nick asked, cautiously:

"What family named Adams do you mean?"

"Is there more than one family of that name

living in Midwood?"

"That isn't answering my question," said Nick, quickly.

"The ones I wish to find are a widow and her son."

"What do you want of them?" demanded Fred.

"That's a personal question, young man."

"Nothing doing, then," said Nick, and he and Fred walked away, leaving the man gazing at them fairly dumbfounded.

"Great Scott!" he muttered. "What is the mystery in all this?"

"We'd better watch that man and warn Al about him," said Nick.

"But suppose he is just some innocent fellow?" suggested Fred, with a grin. "What fools we'd be."

"Can't afford to run chances," replied Marsh, coolly.

So, to the increased astonishment of the man, they watched him narrowly, and the old gentleman began to feel decidedly uncomfortable.

At this juncture Al and his mother came out of their cottage to get some vegetables from their garden, and, seeing his two chums, the young athlete beckoned to them to come over.

At the same juncture the stranger saw them, too, and a startled cry burst from his lips, and he dashed across the road like a madman, scaring Nick and Fred, who immediately ran after him.

Flinging open the gate, the stranger rushed into the garden, and as Al and his mother glanced up at him in astonishment, he came running straight toward them, shouting, excitedly:

"Mary! Mary!"

Mrs. Adams glared wildly at him an instant and turned as pale as death. Then she sprang to meet him with a wild cry of "John! My husband!"

And the next instant they were clasped in each other's arms!

Al was startled, to say the least.

He saw his mother weeping tears of joy, and he saw the stranger kissing her and caressing her in the most tender manner.

"Is this my father?" the dazed boy asked.

The man released his wife, and, seizing Al's hand, he eagerly looked him over and asked:

"Oh, Mary! Can this be my son?"

"It is! Al, Al! This is your father!"

The boy was thrilled.

"I do not remember you, sir," he said. "You have been away from us so long that we gave you up as being dead."

"Yes, yes; I know! But all will be explained. And to think that the little baby boy has developed into such a fine, big, manly fellow!"

And he gazed in undisguised admiration at his boy.

At this juncture Nick and Fred, seeing what an error they had made, discreetly went away, leaving the happy, reunited family alone.

The young athlete and his newly-found father had a long talk, and when all three had gone into the cottage, Al asked his father to account for his long absence in the West.

This point had been the blight of the boy's life. John Adams had a long interesting story to tell his wife and son, which in substance was about as follows:

(To be continued)

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INTERESTING ARTICLES

WHAT HERRINGS GIVE US

From the scales of herring, sardines and shad comes an essence that is expected to be an important product of the Pacific Coast. Artificial pearls are made from it. Mixed with celluloid, it imparts a lasting sheen to toilet articles. It also gives glitter to Christmas tree trimmings and to the tops of parasols.

BRIEF, BUT POINTED

The bakers in France are subjected to unusual rules and regulations. In large fortified towns, for instance, they must always have a certain stock on hand in case of war. Not only this, but everywhere they have to deposit a sum of money in the hands of the municipal authorities as a surety of good conduct. The authorities also fix the price at which bread is sold.

HOSPITAL SHIPS EXEMPT FROM CAPTURE

According to the rules of civilized warfare, hospital ships are exempt from capture. They must, however, fly the Red Cross flag as well as their national flag. All hospital ships are painted white, with a broad green band running right around the hull. The medical, hospital and religious staff of any captured ship cannot be made prisoners of war.

SHE TOOK THE HINT

A popular English author was wholly incapacitated from work by a lady who lived next door and strummed through Handel's "Messiah." His idea of the inviolability of an Englishman's house did not allow him to send in any messages, and he was at his wits' end till he saw in a daily paper that steam whistles could be bought to fit on to kettle spouts. He provided himself with one and put the kettle on the fire in the room nearest the singer. As soon as the whistle began he went out. Of course, the bottom came off the kettle, but it cost little to solder it on again, and after two or three solderings the lady took the hint.

BETHLEHEM'S CHIEF INDUSTRY

The chief industry today of the town of Bethlehem, in Palestine, is the manufacturing of articles of religious devotion and ornaments from mother-of-pearl. The methods and tools used are mostly quite primitive in character, as are also the buildings in which the workmen carry on their trade. The principal products are carved shells on which religious scenes are depicted, beads and rosaries. The material known as "pearl waste," from which the two latter products are made, is very largely imported from the United States, and the American market also is the largest purchaser of these goods. The large carved shells are sold mostly to tourists in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, and since the demand for them is not so good as for beads and a higher grade of workmanship is required to produce them, this side of the industry is losing ground to the manufacturer of beads.

LAUGHS

"Say, do you know why that automobile does not run?" "No. Why?" "Because its wheels are tired."

Discontented wife—Several of the men whom I refused when I married you are richer than you are now. Husband—That's why.

"Tommy, mother has letters to write. Won't you please be quiet?" "Yes, muvver, if you'll give me my drum to play with."

Mother—What's little sister crying for? Willie—She dug a hole in the yard, and she's cryin' 'cause she can't take it into the house with her.

The teacher was asking questions. She said: "Now, pupils, how many months have twenty-eight days?" "All of them, teacher," replied the boy in the front seat.

Wife—I noticed your coat on the hall stand this morning is covered with mud. Husband—Yes, it dropped into the gutter as I was coming home last night. Wife—And were you in it?

Wearry traveler (at railway station on a north-country line)—Is there a cemetery here? Porter—No, sir. Wearry traveler—Then where do you bury people who die when waiting for trains?

"Father, I had a fight with Percy Raymond today." "I know you did," replied the father, soberly. "Mr. Raymond came to see me about it." "Well," said the son, "I hope you came out as well as I did."

"Herbert," said the school-teacher, turning to a bright youngster, "can you tell me what lightning is?" "Yes, ma'am," was the ready reply of the boy. "Lightning is streaks of electricity." "Well, that may pass!" said the teacher, encouragingly. "Now tell me why it is that lightning never strikes twice in the same place." "Because," answered Herbert, "after it hits once the same place ain't there any more."

Denounced On His Wedding Eve.

Mildred Montroy was an orphan.

I had known her mother and father well, and at the death of the latter I was appointed Mildred's guardian.

She was, by the consent of her parents, engaged to one Wilbur Whitting, a promising young man, also an orphan, who was completing his education in Europe.

When Mildred was twenty-one they were to be married.

I was at this time established as a private detective in New York City.

Three months before the day set for Mildred's wedding Wilbur Whitting returned home from Europe.

I had never seen him before, and I must confess that, while he was a handsome fellow, there was something in his bold and crafty glance that filled me with a vague and undefined distrust.

One night I was standing in the lobby of the Hoffman House, when I saw Wilbur Whitting and two other young men enter the barroom.

I knew the companions of young Whitting.

One was Jerry Bolter, an ex-convict, and the other the notorious Smith Whittaker, the "safe blower," or "Prince of the Gopher Men," as his associates called him.

I sauntered into the gilded saloon after the two young men and my ward's affianced.

As they stood drinking at the bar, a few words of their conversation came to my ears quite distinctly.

"Tonight at eleven. Red Mike's place in the Bowery," said Whittaker.

"All right; I'll be there," answered Wilbur Whitting.

With this they separated.

I kept the two criminals under surveillance until they entered a disreputable dive saloon in the lower part of the Bowery.

When, at the appointed time, Wilbur Whitting arrived at the place and entered it I did the same.

It chanced that I had been in disguise when I saw my ward's affianced and his criminal associate enter the barroom in the Hoffman House.

I wore the same costume now, and so I feared no recognition.

Wilbur Whitting passed straight through the barroom and entered a room at its rear, which the barkeeper unlocked for him and then relocked when he had entered.

I caught sight of Bolter and Smith Whittaker in the rear room.

I lounged about the saloon as long as I dared, without exposing myself to suspicion, for the place was a resort of criminals, who are very quick to spot a "fly cop," as they call the detectives.

Finally I passed out to the street.

Not twenty minutes later three men came out. They were in disguise, but their voices betrayed them to me.

"I don't know, boys, as I ought to run the risk of detection by taking a hand in the work you have laid out for tonight, for I'm sure of a for-

tune with the detective's ward, and I've no call for any more of this work," said Whitting.

"That's so; but you like the cold dollars, and you'll need some of them before your wedding day," said Whittaker.

"True," resented Whitting.

"Are you sure Katholina is dead?" suddenly asked Bolter.

"Yes. Did we not have Viva's word for that before we left Europe? But why do you ask?" said Whitting.

"I could almost swear I saw the face of Katholina look out of the window of a carriage that passed me today. She is a revengeful woman, and if she should yet be living, she may seek to block your little game."

"I tell you she is dead," said Whitting.

With this they passed on, and I heard no more. They took their way to a private residence on East Thirty-first Street.

I crept along on the opposite side of the street. Glancing up at the number of the house in front of which I had taken my stand, I saw the number, and consequently knew what the number of the house of the criminals had halted before must be.

The house was that of a wealthy friend of mine. The burglars began to work at the lock.

It would never do to let them enter the house.

I crossed the street and blew a shrill whistle.

I was aware that I could not arrest three persons alone.

Instantly the burglars rushed from the house.

I crouched down close beside the fence.

They passed me, but the affianced of Mildred, who came last, saw me.

Quick as thought he whipped out a knife and made a leap at me.

My revolver cracked, and a bullet went crashing through the hand that grasped the knife.

Then I dashed away.

Next day I met Mildred in the library.

"Mildred," I said, "something troubles you. Will you not trust me by telling me what it is? Remember, my child, I have your best good at heart. I would fill to you the place as a father."

"How shall I begin?" she said, after a moment or so of silence. "Let me see," she went on. "From the first day of Wilbur's return he puzzled me. There was something about him unlike the Wilbur I had promised to marry. Do you believe he could have changed in his nature, or could have forgotten many little things that occurred before he went to Europe?"

"I hardly think so," I answered.

"The more I have thought of this the more troubled I have become, and now, at last, I have arrived at the startling conclusion that Wilbur Whitting is not the Wilbur Whitting to whom I was engaged before he left for Europe!"

The time to tell her of the discoveries I had made regarding the character of Wilbur Whitting had come, and I was glad that our conversation had led to that point.

I told Mildred all.

She was startled.

A terrible possibility had occurred to me.

I believed now that the man whom we had received as Wilbur Whitting was an impostor, and the question arose: What had become of the real Wilbur Whitting?—granting that my suspicion was correct.

Undoubtedly he was the victim of foul play. That very day I arrested Bolter.

I had proof enough of his complicity in a daring robbery, recently committed, to send him "up the river" for ten years.

I meant to use him to help ferret out the mystery of Wilbur Whitting.

Alone with the burglar in his cell, I said:

"If you will help me in a certain matter, I'll fix it so you can turn State's evidence and get clear."

"Done," said Bolter.

This was not a case of honor among thieves.

"Do you know a woman called Katholina?"

"Yes."

"Do you think she is in the city?"

"I do."

"Describe her to me."

He did so.

"Now tell me who this woman really is."

"You won't give me away as your informant?"

"No, I will not."

"Very well; the woman is really the wife of Wilbur Whitting."

"Is Wilbur Whitting his real name?"

"There you have me. That's what he called himself when I met him in Paris. He told me he meant to get rid of his wife so as to marry a girl in New York, who was an heiress. He thinks his wife, Katholina, is dead, for he hired an assassin of the Barriers to put her out of the way before he left Paris."

This was all Bolter could tell me.

It was the day before the night set for Mildred's marriage, when at last I met the woman I had searched for so long face to face on Broadway.

"Katholina," I said.

She turned quickly and said in English, with a marked French accent:

"You call my name. Who are you?"

"A friend. I can help you find your husband," I replied.

The lady was greatly agitated, but she took my arm, and I conducted her to my office, where she told me that her husband was an American, whom she had married in Paris two years previous.

She was poor but beautiful, and her husband soon tired of her and ill-treated her.

A few months before she had been assaulted and stabbed while returning from a cafe to her room alone.

The assassin left her for dead, but she was taken to the hospital, and finally recovered.

When she left the hospital she could for a long time find no trace of her husband, whose name was Leslie Burton, but at last she learned he had sailed for New York.

After the facts came to her knowledge, through the confession of the assassin who had attempted her murder, that convinced her Leslie Burton had plotted her death, and gone to America to marry another.

Katholina had never heard the name of Wilbur Whitting.

As she concluded the narrative, the substance of which we have given, I heard Wilbur Whitting's step on the stairs, and I placed Katholina behind a screen, telling her that I believed her husband was coming, but that she must not on any account betray herself.

We conversed for a while on unimportant topics, and then he left.

Katholina rushed forth.

"It is he, my faithless husband, upon whom I would be revenged," she said.

"You shall be," I said.

Then we arranged a surprise for the false Wilbur Whitting.

That night, just before the time for Whitting's marriage with Mildred came, he was alone with the woman whom he meant to betray.

Suddenly the door opened, and Katholina appeared in full evening dress, as if she had come to the house as one of the wedding guests.

"Leslie Burton, I denounce you as an impostor!" she cried.

"What means this? I am an honest man!" cried Burton.

"You lie. The wound in your hand which you received from my pistol proves you are a criminal," I cried.

"Curses on you!" gritted the foiled villain, and he felt for a pistol.

Quick as a flash I "covered" him, and at a signal from me one of my assistants darted into the room and handcuffed him.

At that moment there came a surprise for me. A young man, so like Burton that you could hardly tell the difference between them, rushed into the room.

"I am Wilbur Whitting!" he cried.

Mildred sprang into his arms.

He told how he had made the acquaintance of Burton in Italy, where he had soon after been kidnapped by brigands, as he now believed, at Burton's instigation.

Whitting had made his escape from the brigands, and at once set out for home.

His arrival was timely, and Mildred became his wife that very night.

SOMETHING ABOUT UMBRELLAS

Nearly every one of our young people has spent some time speculating as to how an umbrella is made. The way umbrellas are made is of considerable interest. The ribs and stems are generally turned out by factories making a speciality of them, and are sent thence to the real manufacturer. Here, first, the man whose work it is to assemble the parts inserts a bit of wire into the small holes at the end of the ribs, draws them together about the main rod, and puts on the ferrule. In cutting the cloth 75 thicknesses, or thereabouts are arranged upon a table, at which skilled operators work. In another room are girls who operate hemming machines. A thousand yards of hemmed goods is but a day's work for one of these girls. The machines at which they work have a speed of some three thousand revolutions a minute. The next operation is the sewing of the triangular pieces together by machinery. The covers and frames are now ready to be brought together. In all, there are twenty-one places where the cover is to be attached to the frame in the average umbrella. The handle is next glued on, and the umbrella is ready for pressing and inspection.

ITEMS OF INTEREST

INDIA'S HOLI FESTIVAL

At the time of the vernal equinox, on the night of the full moon, the popular Holi Festival is celebrated by the Hindus of India. The ceremonies, lasting for three days, are derived from the ancient Spring festival. This festival, originally a solemn religious rite, has degenerated and is now known as the Saturnalia of India. Bonfires are lit around the temples and sacrifices are made to the gods. Red powder called kun-kuma is thrown about, as Occidentals throw confetti, and the clothing of the people become covered with it.

ELEPHANTS THAT BURN

Mixed metaphors are not by any means uncommon. Some times they are merely inept; occasionally they are ludicrous. In England the other day the Salford City Council emitted a gem.

The question under municipal debate was whether Salford wanted to have an exhibition hall. There seems to have been considerable difference of opinion. Said one speaker.

"I do not want the Council to get their fingers burnt with a white elephant!"

FOSSIL TREE TRUNKS PRESERVE BUDS

An extensive fossil-plant bed in a picturesque part of the Black Hills Rim in South Dakota is known as the Fossil Cycad National Monument. The cycads were of a tree-fern type and the fossil tree trunks first attracted attention about thirty years ago. Later investigations and discoveries have revealed the fact that these trunks, millions of years ago in the age when egg-laying monsters were still extant, actually bore flowers.

While no fully opened fossil flowers have been found, many of the trunks contain expanded buds and, in still other instances, fruits that had begun to mature before fossilization began. It is believed that the open flowers were so delicate in structure that they wilted and were destroyed before fossilization could preserve them. The flowering must have been profuse, as some of the trunks preserved show nearly 500 buds.—*N. Y. Times.*

ABOUT THE SILVER DOLLAR

The silver dollar has undergone many changes since it was put in circulation in 1794. On the face of the first dollar there was stamped the head of a young woman, turned to right and with hair flowing as if she was in a gale of wind; but, in 1796, Congress came to her relief and ordered her hair to be tied up with a bit of ribbon. The fifteen stars, which appeared on the first dollar, were after this reduced to the original thirteen, in recognition of the number of states. In 1836 the design was again changed and the dollar bore the figure of a woman dressed in a flowing garment. The designer forgot, however, to put in the thirteen stars, and the coin was discarded, the new design having the woman surrounded by stars. Her air was defiant and stiff-looking, and, in 1838, dollars were issued which were more artistic in

treatment. The first dollars bearing the motto "In God We Trust" were coined in April, 1864, and in 1873 the era of the trade dollar began, lasting just five years. The liberty dollar made its appearance in 1918. Miss Anne W. Williams, a public school teacher of Philadelphia, sat for the portrait.

CEMETERY YIELDS TOMBSTONES OF COLONIAL DAYS

Fifty tombstones, bearing the names of New York's prominent families of Revolutionary days, have just been discovered in an abandoned corner of Evergreen Cemetery, Brooklyn, according to Harold S. Fitz Randolph, of the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society.

The tombstones, lost since they were removed from the down-town graveyards of the old Presbyterian Brick Church in 1856 and 1865, were discovered by Mr. Randolph quite by accident during his genealogical researches a few days ago. Mr. Randolph, finding the stones lying flat in a field, and covered by three inches of sod and moss, did not suspect until he had cleaned the inscriptions that he had stumbled on one of the most valuable genealogical discoveries of recent years.

As soon as he had read the inscriptions, however, he realized that these were the stones from the graveyard of the old First Presbyterian Church, founded in 1768 and known from 1776 to 1856 as "the Brick Church." This church, a rival of the famous Old Trinity, was built in the little square formed by Park Row, Nassau Street and Beekman Street in 1767, two years after the old St. Paul's, which still stands.

At that time Trinity Church, representing the Church of England, was still dominant, and its state-influenced laws forbade the administration of large charitable bequests in favor of the Presbyterians. In 1784, however, following the freedom of the Colonies, the Brick Church came into its own and grew rapidly. Among its members were many of the leaders of the old New York.

In 1856 the pressure of the financial district made it necessary for the Brick Church to move uptown, and in the confusion attending this removal the old tombstones were carted out to Evergreen and apparently forgotten. When Mr. Randolph discovered the stones, which make one of the most important chapters in the genealogy of New York City, he immediately reported the discovery to the Rev. William P. Merrill, pastor of the Brick Presbyterian Church at Fifth Avenue and Thirty-seventh Street.

Mr. Merrill and Alfred E. Marling, president of the board of trustees, said that the history of the lost tombstones was a mystery to all members and officers of the present church and promised to take immediate steps to have the tombstones at Evergreens cleaned of their covering of moss and properly set.

The stones already cleaned by Mr. Randolph show such well known New York names as Barlett, Berrier, Bird, Bowman, Butler, Carney, Carter, Cummings, Del, Noce, Du Bois, Folger, Frazer, Fulton, Gorham, Grant, Greenleaf, Harrison, Lane, Lethbridge, Neal, Prince and Rhodes.

TIMELY TOPICS

WHITE HOUSE RACCOON LEADS 2-HOUR CHASE

Rebecca, pet raccoon of President Coolidge, slipped away recently and for two hours played hide and seek with White House servants, who finally caught her in a tree in an adjoining yard. The raccoon, quite a favorite with the President, seemed to take considerable delight in leading the searchers from tree to tree before she finally consented, quite peacefully, to being returned to her home on top of a stump in the rear of the temporary White House.

INSTRUMENTS OF THE JAPANESE

Japanese girls of the upper and middle classes learn to play the "koto," while those in the lower orders usually learn the "samisen." The "koto" is a narrow horizontal instrument about five feet long with a sounding board upon which are stretched strings supported by ivory bridges. It is played by means of ivory finger tips. The player sits before the instrument on the floor in the ordinary posture, and when she touches the strings she often sings a soft accompaniment. The "samisen" is a kind of banjo and is often played during theatrical performances and recitations. It gives forth dull and monotonous tones.

EXPECTS FLOOD SESSION

United States Senator Royal S. Copeland, addressing the New York branch of the Loyal Knights of the Round Table, a non-partisan organization, at the Hotel Astor admitted he was a bit disappointed because President Coolidge had not called a special session of Congress to consider relief measures for the Mississippi flood.

Dr. Copeland said, however, that he understood the President was about to reconsider and issue the special session call. He said he had offered his whole-hearted support to Mr. Coolidge in such a plan.

Senator Copeland also said that Thomas Jefferson had caused to be carved on his tombstone the three greatest achievements of his political life. These were his contributions to the Declaration of Independence, the cause of religious freedom and the establishment of the University of Virginia. "And of these," said Senator Copeland, "the cause of religious freedom is the greatest."

VIRGINIA MANSION TO BE RESTORED

The movement to restore the historic old homes of Virginia numbers among its latest subjects the long-neglected Wythe house of Williamsburgh, the old Colonial capital. The romantic spot of Palace Green recently became the property of Bruton Parish Church; next door, said to be America's oldest church.

With the aid of the Colonial Dames of America and of other contributors the church has had the house redecorated in the style of the Queen Anne-Sir Christopher Wren period and furnished with handsome Colonial relics. Part of the house will be reserved for the uses of the parish; the rest as a public museum.

Even in its decaying state the house was a

show-spot of the town as the home of one of America's greatest lawyers, George Wythe, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and a leader in the affairs of the Colony and of the infant Republic. George Wythe, when a member of the House of Burgesses, headed the committee to remonstrate to King George III and the houses of Parliament against the proposed Stamp act. So plainspoken and so forceful was he in his petition that the papers had to be toned down before they could be used. He was one of the party that raided Governor Dunmore's home for munitions, and he was among the first to volunteer for army service; but America needed his brain rather than his sword.

George Wythe served in Congress while the Revolution was going on. He helped to frame the Constitution and was a member of the Virginia Convention that ratified it. He helped to revise the statutes of Virginia and to prepare her for transition from a Colony to a State. He also devised Virginia's seal, showing virtue tramping vice under foot, with the motto: "Sic Semper Tyrannis."

For thirty-five years George Wythe was at the head of the bar of Virginia. He held the first chair of law in America, at William and Mary College, Williamsburgh. Thomas Jefferson and John Marshall were among his students. He was Chancellor of Virginia for many years, and it was in his court that Henry Clay, as a clerk, came under his influence, Wythe directing Clay's reading.

Chancellor Wythe was known for his sweet temper, his benevolence and his simplicity of character. In later life he freed all his slaves and provided the means for their subsistence. Professionally, he was known for his legal learning his ability and his integrity. He would never argue a case in which he did not believe, and he had the courage to be the first judge to decide, in spite of adverse popular clamor, that British claims for debts contracted by Americans before the war were recoverable.

Wythe's home in Williamsburgh was left to him by his father-in-law, Richard Taliaferro, who built it in 1760. It was a brick residence of two stories and a small front porch, its walls hung with ivy and Virginia creeper and surrounded with a tangled garden. Interest has long been drawn to it on account of the personality and achievements of its distinguished master and also as a result of the stories that have been inspired beneath its roof.

It has been the sport of skeptics to sleep in George Wythe's bedchamber on the night of June 8; but none, it is said, has ever been willing to repeat the experience. Wythe died a violent death from poisoning, for which his nephew was tried and acquitted. Although this happened in Richmond, his ghost is said to have transferred its operations to Williamsburgh; for it is the closet door of Wythe's chamber there that is said to blow open violently at the hour of his death, letting in a gust of chill wind. A ghostly hand is said to clasp the brow of anybody occupying the bed.—N. Y. Times

PLUCK AND LUCK

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